

Responses

RESPONSE TO BOETTKE

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Professor Boettke and I have been engaged in a running debate over the last few years that has mostly escaped wider notice, as it involves extremely mundane matters of interest only to Austrian methodology nerds.¹ There is some irony in the fact that I have chosen to confront Boettke on his home territory. Not only is he the reigning undisputed world expert about all things Austrian, but he has always been an extremely kind and generous supporter of my career, a generosity I have repaid by repeatedly attacking his arguments in print.² So, I welcome the opportunity to clarify what, from my perspective, separates us on the crucial, if painfully nerdy, issues at stake.

I agree with Professor Boettke that my project in “Hayekian political epistemology” is consistent with and complementary to his project in “epistemic institutionalism.” A few contributors to this symposium suggest that I reject Boettke’s epistemic institutionalism, but this is not true. In fact, I accept epistemic institutionalism, albeit with the qualification that there is more still to be said about the *epistemic* side of epistemic institutionalism. Boettke should take the epistemic aspect of epistemic institutionalism as seriously as he takes the institutionalist aspect. My book can be read as an effort to fill in what I take to be the lacunae in this part of Boettke’s epistemic institutionalism.

From my perspective, the problem is that Boettke wants to talk about epistemics—i.e., he wants to talk about the study of “the use of knowledge in society”—but not about epistemology. He wants to talk about how knowledge is used in society, without saying what knowledge *is* and how it is *acquired*. I deny that epistemics can proceed without a grounding in some general theory of knowledge. The general epistemology we adopt will determine much about our epistemics. If we assume, say, a Cartesian epistemology in which individuals have automatic and infallible access to their own mental states, a theory of knowledge in which *certainty* about the world of experience is assumed to be epistemically possible, then the study of the use of such knowledge in society—epistemics—will lead to different results than if we assume, say, a Humean epistemology in which certainty of empirical matters is impossible and individuals do not have infallible access to, well, anything. Founded on a Cartesian epistemology, epistemics will frequently invoke the use of knowledge of one’s own mental states, conceived as certain and infallible. Based on a Humean epistemology, epistemics will never invoke infallible knowledge of one’s own mental states; all knowledge other than that of the demonstrable will be conceived as uncer-

tain and merely probable. Epistemics will look different depending on the theory of knowledge, the epistemology, that grounds it.

So, my first complaint against Boettke is that epistemic institutionalism needs an underlying theory of knowledge and its acquisition. Epistemic institutionalism without an underlying epistemology is empty or, at best, shallow. If the epistemic institutionalist does not define what he means by knowledge, if he remains silent on the nature of learning, then he is ultimately relying on an unrigorous, folksy, conception of human psychology and epistemology that is likely of dubious value for scientific research.

My second complaint is closely related to the first. Inasmuch as Boettke countenances epistemology, he continues to push the, to my mind, untenable notion that there is positive value to be found in Mises' epistemological writings.

I will address this issue in more detail below when I consider Professor Koppl's invocation of an evolutionary interpretation of Mises' epistemology, but the problem with Mises' epistemology is not that it cannot be rationally reconstructed. The problem is that it can be rationally reconstructed in *too many ways*, in ways that are mutually inconsistent with each other, and that we lack criteria for choosing between these mutually inconsistent interpretations. So, even though it is true, as Koppl notes, that Mises offered a sketch (but, I think, no more than a sketch) of an evolutionary epistemology. It is also true that Mises wrote other things that cannot be squared with an evolutionary epistemology. Neither is this a simple matter of Mises' epistemological views changing over time. He was occasionally inconsistent about epistemological matters within the same work, sometimes from one page to the next, as I will show below.

So, which was the true Mises, the evolutionary epistemologist or the epistemologist who denied experience any part in our knowledge of human action? Or some other Mises?

The various parties to this debate—and there are many, corresponding to diverse, mutually-inconsistent, interpretations of Mises' epistemology—simply pick their favorite Mises on whatever grounds they happen to find appealing and ignore all of the textual evidence that conflicts with their preferred interpretation.³ There is a Kantian Mises, an Aristotelian Mises, a Millian Mises, a Lakatosian Mises, a conventionalist Mises, an anti-conventionalist Mises, and still others.⁴ These cannot all be the real Mises.

My own view is that we should not pick and choose between various readings of Mises' epistemology, but that we should take it on its own terms, acknowledge its manifest inconsistencies, and look for a consistent alternative that serves the purposes of Austrian economics. Austrians have available an internally consistent, scientifically and philosophically respectable, naturalistic epistemology—Hayek's—that can replace Misesian apriorism without loss (indeed, I suspect, with some considerable gain) to the Austrian canon.⁵ All that is required is to utter those three little words that, for whatever reason, stick in the throats of so many Austrians: "Mises was wrong."

So, from my perspective, the difference between Boettke and I concerns the epistemological underpinnings of epistemic institutionalism: in the first instance, whether such underpinnings are necessary (I think they are) and, in the second, whether Misesian underpinnings are sufficient (I think they are not) for the purposes of epistemic institutionalism.

Before proceeding, I'd like to clarify a few further points about the book in light of Boettke's review.

First, I am a great admirer of Don Lavoie's work on the history and significance of the socialist-calculation debate. I refer to it repeatedly, and mostly positively, in the book. My only real criticism of Lavoie's work in this area is that he basically had, all the way back in the early 1980s, all of the ingredients required to make the argument concerning the priority of the problem of policymaker ignorance that I make in the first chapter of the book, but 1) he did not pull all of these ingredients together, and 2) he did not recognize the full generality of the problem and, thus, its relevance to liberalism and liberalization policies.

Related to this, I do in fact engage with the work of James Buchanan many times in the book (although some of this discussion is relegated to footnotes). The first chapter of the book includes an explicit attack on the conception of policymakers (knavish, but knowledgeable) employed in public choice analysis and constitutional political economy. Indeed, there is a long footnote in the first chapter (p. 31, fn. 7) in which I

explicitly criticize Buchanan for getting the logical relationship between ignorance and incentives exactly wrong, while praising Lavoie for getting it exactly right.

Boettke also suggests that I should engage with Koppl's *Expert Failure*, but this is a completed task. In my contribution to the *Cosmos + Taxis* symposium on *Expert Failure*, I explicate what I take to be the implications of my project for Koppl's and of Koppl's project for mine (Scheall 2019, pp. 45-46).

One might infer from Boettke's comments that I ignore *expectations* in the book. It is true that I do not use the word very often, but expectations are central to the Hayekian epistemology developed in Chapter Four, according to which knowledge is *actionable belief*. For Hayek, *knowing* is all about putting one's beliefs to work to act effectively in the future. To *know* is to be able to plan (if only tacitly) for the future and to realize relevant goals without the need for the intervention of spontaneity. One knows inasmuch as one's expectations of (i.e., beliefs about) the future are actionable.

RESPONSE TO KOPPL

Professor Koppl takes me to task, justifiably so, for failing to proffer a straightforward definition of knowledge in my discussion of Hayek's epistemology. The definition of knowledge as actionable belief is in fact there in Chapter Four, but it is admittedly rather obscure and certainly not highlighted as much as it should be, given its central importance. Knowledge is "belief that can be put to work in the service of deliberately realizing the believer's goals" (p. 128). With regard to a particular policy goal, policymakers "know to the extent that they can design, implement, and deliberately (i.e., without need for intervention of spontaneous forces) realize the goal—that is, inasmuch as they can form, *even if only in principle*, an actionable plan for the realization of the goal—and their (policy-relevant) knowledge consists of everything that is assumed, *implicitly or explicitly*, in their actionable political plans" (p. 128; italics added).

There are two points to note about this definition *vis a vis* Koppl's criticisms.

First, given Hayek's epistemological naturalism and practical dualism about mentalistic language, "belief" is ultimately mentalistic shorthand for some natural phenomena occurring in the physical brain about which our knowledge is, and is likely to remain, too limited to explain and predict in detailed physical terms. I hope this addresses Koppl's comment that, in his view, knowledge need not be a kind of belief. If what he means by this is that knowledge is ultimately a physical phenomenon in the brain, then we are not far apart. Indeed, if what he means—and this seems to be what he suggests—that knowledge is a physical phenomena that affords successful action or, what may be the same thing, effective adaptation to relevant stimuli, then our positions are very close, if not identical.

Second, I believe that the italicized qualifications—"if only in principle" and "implicitly or explicitly"—take care of Koppl's concern about the role I attribute (or do not) to *deliberation* in decision-making. Perhaps because the book is primarily concerned with the knowledge and ignorance of human policymakers and, concomitantly, with the knowledge required to make political *plans* effective, it might seem that I attribute to conscious deliberation a necessary role in successful action and, thus, to actionable belief. However, the qualification that actors—be they policymakers or, to consider Professor Koppl's example, *E. coli* bacteria (inasmuch as there is a difference between policymakers and bacteria)—need only be able to plan *in principle*, and the related qualification that these in-principle plans may be built entirely on implicit (i.e., tacit) assumptions should suffice to counter Koppl's concern that, on my rendering of Hayek's epistemology, organisms incapable of conscious deliberation, like *E. coli* bacteria, cannot possess knowledge.⁶ Given that it hinges on the deliberate realization of an actor's goals, my definition of knowledge requires a certain *purposefulness* or, perhaps better, a *directedness*, of action, toward various states of affairs, but it does not require that the actor (or organism) be conscious of these states of affairs or of the knowledge that might figure in attempts to realize them.

Professor Koppl's claim that I am "moving the goal posts" in crediting Hayek with an evolutionary account of *a priori* knowledge that I deny to Mises is, however, less justified. If the relevant question concerned whether Mises ever wrote anything that can be construed as favorable to an evolutionary epistemol-

ogy, then I would, indeed, be moving the goal posts in crediting this to Hayek and denying it to Mises. But this is not what is at issue in the relevant passages of the book. The question is whether Mises or Hayek offered a coherent and well-developed evolutionary epistemology that is consistent with their other epistemological pronouncements, and with how they used epistemological concepts in their social-scientific work. The question is whether we can look at the scope of their respective epistemological arguments and their use of these arguments for substantive purposes, and discover that a consistent evolutionary-epistemological story is being told. Looking at their respective careers, I think it is clear that this question can be answered in the affirmative with respect to Hayek, but not with regard to Mises.

Perhaps I should have better explained in the book my resistance to a reconstruction of Mises' apriorism along evolutionary-epistemological lines, but, as I have addressed this issue before, most extensively in my "What is Extreme About Mises' Extreme Apriorism" (Scheall 2017a; also see Scheall 2017b), I chose to merely cite this literature, rather than repeat the relevant arguments. In this essay, I argue that the extremeness of Mises' apriorism lies not in the *extent* of his apriorism—after all, Mises claimed only that the so-called "action axiom," "Man acts," was *a priori*—but in his *epistemological justification* of the claim that the action axiom was known *a priori*. I then compare Mises' arguments with the epistemological justification of every other committed apriorist in the history of economic thought—including Nassau Senior, John Stuart Mill, J. E. Cairnes, and Friedrich von Wieser—to show that no other apriorist offered a justification of their apriorism as epistemologically extreme as Mises' justification of the action axiom.

In particular, only Mises defended both the "Reason without Experience" and "Greater Certainty" theses. According to the first, pure reason and not engagement with the environment is the source of the economist's knowledge of fundamental principles, axioms, etc. Mises defended this thesis in a number of places across several decades (Mises [1933] 2003, pp. 13-14; [1949] 1998, p. 64; 1962, pp. 71-72). According to the second thesis, pure reason delivers to the economist more secure knowledge of his *explanans* than the natural scientist can acquire via observation and experimentation. Again, Mises defended this thesis across the decades (Mises [1949] 1998, pp. 39-40; 1962, p. 71). It is this combination of theses that constitute, what I call in the book, Mises' "rationalistic apriorism." Whatever else might be said about other elements of Mises' epistemology, he was clearly an extreme rationalist about knowledge of the action axiom.

As noted above, it is true that Mises sketched the contours of an evolutionary account of *a priori* knowledge. However, I deny that his gestures toward the role of evolution in shaping the human mind amount to anything more than a mere *sketch*, that they constitute anything comparable to the systematic and scientifically-astute evolutionary epistemology that Hayek developed over the course of his career, starting with his first academic writing in 1920. More importantly, I deny that Mises' sketch of an evolutionary epistemology is consistent with his extreme stance on both the Reason without Experience and Greater Certainty theses.

Rather than repeat myself, I will merely quote some relevant passages of my review of Alexander Linsbichler's excellent book *Was Ludwig von Mises a Conventionalist?* (Scheall 2017b) that are relevant to Kopl's defense of Mises.

Mises ([1949] 1998, 34) [...] insisted upon the "essential and necessary" "character of the logical structure of the human mind" immediately before claiming that "[m]an acquired...the logical structure of his mind in the course of his evolution from an amoeba to his present state" (Mises [1949] 1998, 35). The evolutionary epistemology implied by this latter statement would, if adequate, put paid to the former assertion of the necessity of the mind's logical structure. If it is a contingent fact that we evolved as a species in the way that we did—which is, of course, an implication of biological evolution—then the logical structure of the human mind could have been different than it is and, thus, cannot be essential and necessary. This conjunction of propositions suggests confusion, either about the multiple meanings of necessity by then common in the philosophical, logical, and scientific literatures, or about the highly contingent nature of evolutionary processes [see following footnote]. The problem of rationally reconstructing Mises's epistemology is that of reconciling these (and other) instances of seeming epistemological incoherence.

The relevant footnote reads:

There are passages in Mises's methodological writings that suggest he was either not privy to or did not appreciate the significance of many developments in contemporary philosophy and natural science. For example, as late as his last methodological work, 1962's *Ultimate Foundations of Economic Science*, Mises (1962, pp. 12-14) argued for Euclidean geometry as an example of the Kantian synthetic a priori, a position undermined by the discovery of non-Euclidean geometries in the nineteenth century (Caldwell 1984, p. 368 makes the same point) and further confounded by Einsteinian relativity. Similarly, Mises ([1949] 1998, pp. 72-91) continued to argue against the possibility of polylogism long after the existence of multiple logics had been established empirically.

I conclude this review:

Any proposition can be inferred from a contradiction. The fact that many mutually impossible epistemological propositions have been inferred from Mises's writings is an abductive warning that there may be nothing of substance—no “there”—there. That is, the best explanation of the chaotic state of the literature is Mises's own epistemological confusion. Ultimately, we simply do not know what the historical Ludwig von Mises believed about epistemology.

Suffice it to say that I am unmoved by Professor Koppl's defense of Mises's apriorism as built on evolutionary epistemological grounds and his view that Mises and Hayek are epistemologically reconcilable, a view that, as I noted above, Hayek himself always denied.

RESPONSE TO DEKKER

F. A. Hayek and the Epistemology of Politics recommends a kind of analysis and suggests ways that this analysis might proceed in the future, but it does not engage in such analysis. It is not my view that “policymakers will inevitably lack the necessary knowledge to achieve policy goals.” Neither do I argue that, “[e]ven if we would grant policymakers sufficient knowledge [...] they would still be ignorant about the goals of their constituents.” Rather, I argue that the nature and extent of policymaker ignorance is always and everywhere an empirical matter open (to some degree) to scientific analysis. In the absence of the suggested analysis, it is not appropriate to advance positive or negative policy, or political-philosophical, recommendations. What Dekker reads as nihilism is a studied agnosticism consistent with—indeed, necessitated by—the book's philosophical nature.

The analysis that the book recommends is precisely inquiry into “the general nature and range of our ignorance concerning” society that Hayek (1960, p. 23) advocated as a necessary precursor to understanding “how society works” and to the positive policy advice that Dekker seeks. Part of my argument, however, is that Hayek's positive policy and political-philosophical proposals failed to meet the standards he set for others. Hayek's constructive suggestions were not—at least, not obviously—immune to policymaker ignorance and he made no attempt to show that they were. Though he recognized that policymaker ignorance could undermine the case for illiberal economic policies, he apparently did not see that ignorance also complicated the case for liberalism and liberalization policies. I have no objection to Hayek's view that liberalism should be a positive program, but any positive program, however liberal (or not), that has not been shown to be either immune to the problem of policymaker ignorance or spontaneously realizable, given the nature and extent of relevant policymaker ignorance, is in need of justification of exactly the sort that Hayek demanded from defenders of more interventionist economic policy programs. So, Dekker's critique of the book through a constructive Hayekian lens leaves the central problem of Hayek's positive programming unresolved.

Professor Dekker's claim that there is nihilism lurking in the Austrian tradition strikes me as problematic, at least as an assertion about Austrian economists of all but the first few generations. It seems to me that, more or less universally, modern Austrians *do* believe that the world can be improved, namely, by further liberalizing existing political conditions. If what Dekker means by this claim of latent nihilism is that Austrians ultimately lack a justification for their preference for liberalism that meets the standards they demand from socialists and other economic interventionists, then I agree. This is the central argument of Chapter Three. In my view, Austrians (and other liberals of varying degrees of liberality) need to develop a justification for their preferences that stands up to the problem of policymaker ignorance—which is, in effect, the justification they demand from socialists and other economic interventionists—or embrace, not nihilism, but *skepticism* about particular policies and political philosophies.

It is important to emphasize, however, that the skepticism I advise is not of a “radical” variety, as Dekker suggests it is. I do not argue that liberals should, like Pyrrho, do nothing about the man drowning in the canal. In the absence of evidence that a particular political program is either immune to the problem of policymaker ignorance or spontaneously realizable, it does not follow that *inaction* is the appropriate policy response. (Inaction is itself a political program that, inasmuch as it is conceived as a means to the end of realizing particular states of affairs, can involve heavy epistemic burdens, as I argue in Chapter Three.) Rather, the skepticism suggested is of a *Humean* variety (p. 77), as Professor Schilesser perceptively notes in his commentary on the book. In the absence of evidence that a particular political program is either immune to the problem of policymaker ignorance or spontaneously realizable, the appropriate *epistemic* response is to withhold positive belief in the proposition that the program can realize its ostensible goals.⁷ This implies nothing about the appropriate *policy* response under such circumstances.

I have no objection to policy experimentation. I agree with Dekker that we will probably learn much of value to political epistemology by observing the results of various policy experiments. However, such experimentation should proceed in full awareness of the effects of ignorance on options, preferences, goals, motives, incentives, etc. More to the point, in the absence of evidence that relevant policies are either immune to the problem of policymaker ignorance or spontaneously realizable, given the nature and extent of relevant ignorance, such experimentation should proceed skeptically, not optimistically (as one might think it too often does).

Knowledge is never binary, but always a matter of degree. I speak throughout the book of the “nature and extent” of a person's ignorance. That knowledge is a matter of degree is also implied by the significant role I assign to spontaneity, if some goal is to be realized despite a degree of relevant ignorance. The pertinent question to ask of the pursuit of a goal, in politics as in everyday life, is always “How much (and what kind of) ignorance is there and how much (and what kind of) spontaneity is required?”

The central concept of an epistemic burden is defined in the book in terms of the “the nature and extent of the ignorance that an actor in a particular context must overcome [i.e., the knowledge that must yet be *learned*] in order to use some means to deliberately realize some end” (p. 3). Similarly, the problem of policymaker ignorance is defined as “the simple fact that the success of purposeful political action is necessarily limited by the nature and extent of policymakers' ignorance and *their capacities to learn*” (p. 1; italics added). Thus, the role of learning processes in possibly mitigating policymaker ignorance is well accounted for in the book.

Uncertainty is not some category distinct from knowledge and ignorance on the Hayekian epistemology described in Chapter Four and, consequently, it gets cut by Occam's Razor. If you are uncertain about the occurrence of some event, then you lack quantifiable knowledge about its occurrence. You are limited in your ability to put related beliefs to work to form an actionable plan—you are ignorant, to some degree. Hayekian ignorance encompasses Knightian uncertainty.

Professor Dekker claims that I think individuals have “clear” sets of preferences. If this is supposed to mean that I believe persons' preferences are *given* to them, then the arguments of the first chapter for the logical priority of the epistemic undermine this assertion. The courses of action over which a person might

have preferences in some decision context are never simply given. What constitutes an option is always filtered through and sorted according to the actor's relevant relative epistemic burdens.⁸

I do not claim that one cannot be ignorant of ends. Ignorance can pertain to ends as well as to means. Only if I assumed some sort of Cartesian infallibilism about mental states could I be fairly accused of denying the possibility that a person might fail to know their goals, but I explicitly reject Cartesianism (p. 126). Dekker draws a hard-and-fast distinction between means and ends that appears nowhere in the book and which most philosophers, myself included, would reject as untenable. Some ends can be means and some means ends. The adoption of some means can be a subsidiary end to some ultimate end. The ultimate end of, say, *arriving in New Orleans*, might require the subsidiary end of *driving to New Orleans* as a means to the ultimate end and the sub-subsidiary end of *acquiring an automobile* as a means to the subsidiary end. Nothing in the book implies the mutual disjointedness of means and ends.

RESPONSE TO SCHLIESSER

I am delighted that Professor Schliesser emphasizes what I take to be one of the book's most significant (if not necessarily original) arguments. From the perspective of the problem of policymaker ignorance, every political action is what Schliesser calls a "transition problem." Every political action (indeed, every human action) aims at some state of affairs, either at creating some new or at sustaining existing circumstances. Whether we wish to discover or to develop through Platonic education persons with the knowledge and inclinations necessary to serve as philosopher-kings, whether we want to write a constitution that ensures that existing policymakers (such as they are) are adequately motivated to pursue goals in their constituent's interests, whether we aim to mitigate to some degree a perceived social problem, whether we wish to institute the rule of law in a previously lawless society or, indeed, whether those of us in lawful societies want to secure the continued enforcement of the rule of law in perpetuity, in our political lives, we are always trying to "get there from here" (p. 81). The problem of policymaker ignorance is just that those policymakers charged with getting us to there from here may lack either an adequate roadmap or a functioning vehicle, or both.

Professor Schliesser's "hedged" criticism of my argument that *ought implies* (or whatever) *deliberately can* offers an opportunity to emphasize some of its more subtle aspects that are easily missed.

First, the argument is deployed in defense of the thesis of the logical priority of the epistemic. It is *not* offered as a criterion of rational political choice: I do not argue that policymakers ought not to pursue goals they cannot deliberately realize. Recall the restatement of the book's central arguments in the prologue to this symposium: when the knowledge required to deliberately realize a goal is absent, any purported obligation to pursue it evaporates; this does *not* mean that a new obligation emerges in its place to not pursue the goal. Logically speaking, the contrapositive of "If ought to X, then deliberately can X" is "If not deliberately can X, then *not ought* to X," not "If not deliberately can X, then *ought not* to X." "*Not ought* to X" is not logically equivalent to "*Ought not* to X." The first means there is no obligation to X, the second means there is an obligation to not X. To draw the inference that policymakers ought not to pursue goals they cannot realize is to mistake the logic of the *ought implies* (or whatever) *can* principle, whether or not "can" means *deliberately can*.⁹

Second, it is important to note that I use the concept of *normativity* throughout the book in multiple senses other than just the moral sense. Epistemic considerations are logically prior to—and serve to determine—the moral, prudential, pecuniary, and other normative criteria that also figure in decision-making. In other words, to say that political decision-making is normative is just to say that it proceeds according to norms, standards, or criteria (which may be either explicit or tacit). Political—indeed, all human—decision-making is aimed at satisfying some combination of perhaps moral, perhaps prudential, perhaps pecuniary, perhaps some other kind of criteria concerning how the decision-maker wants the world to be. To say that the epistemic is logically prior to the normative is just to say that, in order to apply these moral, prudential, pecuniary, etc., criteria to a range of options, epistemic criteria—the nature and extent of the

decision-maker's relevant ignorance—must first do their work in pre-sorting courses of action. Ignorance constrains the various ways we might aim to make the world and the various means we might employ to make the world a particular way.

As I use the term, *policymakers* encompass everyone involved in the processes of deciding, designing, implementing, and administering a *policy*, which can be anything from a constitution for global government to the ordinances of a local homeowners' association (p. 15). Thus, many more than elected officials are encompassed in my usage of the term, in particular, the concept includes all those bureaucratic agencies in which institutional memory might agglomerate and all those bureaucrats that Schliesser suggests might be capable of mitigating their epistemic burdens over time. This is an opportunity to reflect a bit more on the knowledge that effective policymaking typically requires.

The kind of knowledge required to deliberately realize some goal is a contextual matter that depends on the goal in question. However, in the final analysis, policymakers will not be able to deliberately realize a goal unless they possess knowledge of the *causes* and of the *relationships that obtain between causes* of the phenomena that they need to control in order to bring about the intended state of affairs. In effect, they need to know whether there are any and, if so, what are the pulleys, gears, and levers to society that they might use to deliberately realize the relevant goal, and they need to know how to manipulate these mechanisms effectively. More carefully, they need an adequate *theory* of the relevant phenomena. Given an adequate theory, they need data concerning the phenomena that are compatible with the theory such that predictions adequate to the degree of control required to realize the goal follow from the marriage of theory and data. Given a conjunction of theory and data adequate to prediction and control, they need the know-how—the abilities, capacities, talents, and powers—to exert the kind and degree of control required. I am open to the possibility that, through the process of attempting to realize various goals, policymakers might learn relevant knowledge, thereby reducing their epistemic burdens either with respect to these goals or in general, but is it at all plausible to think in line with Schliesser's reading of Walter Lippmann that government can create the required knowledge, either directly or indirectly through the "revolving door" of government and university? The Lippmanian story strikes me as fanciful, as does the notion that "data-mining of large administrative data-sets" might provide the causal knowledge, both theoretical and empirical, that deliberate policy success requires.¹⁰

NOTES

- 1 See Scheall (2015, 2017a, 2019) and Boettke (2015, 2018).
- 2 The first piece of advice that Professor Boettke ever gave me was something along the lines of “Never attack idiots or idiotic arguments. Only attack the best, most respected, people and arguments.” So, in defense of my apparent lack of gratitude for Boettke’s generosity, he asked for it!
- 3 Consider Zanotti and Cachanosky (2015), who argue that Fritz Machlup, in his debate with Terence Hutchison, offered an adequate defense of Mises’ apriorism in Lakatosian terms. As I show in Scheall (2017a), Zanotti and Cachanosky’s thesis is defensible only if one ignores the subsequent round of the Machlup-Hutchison debate, in which Machlup admitted that, indeed, Mises’ apriorism was more epistemologically extreme than could be defended on Lakatosian grounds.
- 4 On the various interpretations of Mises’ varying epistemological pronouncements, see Scheall (2017a).
- 5 Both Boettke, in other places (see Boettke 2015 and 2018), and Koppl, in his contribution to the current symposium, try to claim consistency between (their preferred interpretations) of Mises’ epistemology and Hayek’s own epistemology, a proposition that Hayek himself explicitly denied multiple times (see, e.g., Hayek 1978, p. 137, and Hayek 1994, pp. 72–73).
- 6 Of course, it remains open to me, as Koppl suggests, to simply bite the bullet and deny that *E. coli* bacteria and other simple organisms can possess knowledge. However, it would then be necessary to explain the relationship between varying degrees of biological complexity and epistemic capacity. It would be necessary to explain why human beings and, presumably, other higher animals, can possess knowledge, but bacteria, amoebae, and other simple organisms—which, despite their relative simplicity are capable of performing seemingly complex tasks—cannot possess knowledge.
- 7 Contra Dekker (and, to a more limited extent, contra Koppl), I do not offer anything like a constitutional proposal in the book. Chapter Six suggests a method of analyzing policymaker ignorance that—in some future state, after extensive further inquiry—might in principle lead to mitigating, not solving, the problem in real-world contexts, through constitutional reform, subject to the profound limitations described in Devins et al. (2015). Nothing could be further from my view than the notion that we occupy the epistemic position we would have to occupy in order to effectively engage in such constitutional reform. Indeed, I see no reason to think we will ever occupy the epistemic position that constitutional reform consistent with the qualifications of Devins et al. (2015), would require. Yet, the analytical method suggested in Chapter Six may prove fruitful in other respects regardless of how far it leads to positive reform.
- 8 I do not know what Dekker read in the book that made him think it is “within the mainstream welfare economics perspective.” I doubt that the book bears any implications for either of the fundamental theorems of welfare economics, much less for human welfare or well-being. I certainly make no methodological appeals to the use of social-welfare functions as policy instruments that might moderate or annihilate policymaker ignorance.
- 9 Professor Schliesser’s criticisms are “hedged,” because he recognizes that the argument of the book ultimately leads to Humean skepticism, not to the effective nihilism that would be implied if I actually thought policymakers ought not pursue goals they are too ignorant to deliberately realize.
- 10 Though I might miss my “own best insight” in the specific passage that Professor Schliesser quotes from page 140, that insight is emphasized repeatedly throughout the book. I note, for example, that a political-epistemological Utopia would not be a political environment in which policymakers were limited to goals they could deliberately realize on the basis of their knowledge and learning capacity, but “a world in which policymaking was most epistemically feasible subject to the constraint that the world itself be feasible on the basis of policymakers’ existing epistemic capacities and available spontaneous forces” (p. 92). Every political action is a sort of “transition problem” and it is always an open question whether policymakers possess the know-that and know-how required to deliberately effect the transition.

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