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Supervisor: *RH*

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Comments:

This is an interesting piece of work revealing an ability to frame an appropriate research question. There is strong evidence of not just a keen interest in the issues, but also of knowledge & understanding of those issues. That said the philosophical argumentation is a little underdeveloped - you would have done well to have developed the ideas of Rousseau & of Dewey in much more depth, using philosophical secondary sources to enable you to do this. Further there are quite a few lapses in referencing - you must insert references where necessary (this applies whether or not you are citing a quotation). However you present a plausible conclusion & evince relatively sophisticated skill in conceptual analysis.

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Joe Dyer.

A classical Liberal Approach to the issues surrounding Intersectionality and Identity politics through the mediums of Group Rights and Collectivism

Two terms, which have caused much contention in contemporary politics are the terms identity politics and intersectionality. Those who see a need for identity politics and intersectionality generally point towards various inequalities, found within the world, as benchmark for why both terms *should* have a place within contemporary political discussion. Perhaps, even why the terms *have* some place in contemporary politics. Those who wish to disavow the terms exist across many facets of the political spectrum and may disagree with the set of ideas behind these two terms for many different reasons. So we cannot paint the 'anti-identity politics' and 'anti-intersectional' viewpoints all under the same proverbial brush. For instance, an Orthodox Marxist may have reservations with the sentiment behind the two terms for radically different reasons to right leaning Libertarians or Traditional Conservatives. Admittedly, those who give high appraisal of both terms do not all think alike either. However, with regards to the followers of both terms, there are fundamental and constituent parts of both these terms, which an advocate for the usage of the terms must adhere to. Therefore, in order to outline the disagreements with both terms, I will be specifically focusing on one political worldview which stands in opposition to them. I will also, in an attempt to define and give meaning to the terms I am stressing disagreements with, try to find commonalities between those who find the application of both terms useful in contemporary politics.

Pre-
entation

For the purposes of this project, I will try to show the relation identity politics and intersectionality have with group rights and collectivism through such thinkers as Jean Jacques Rousseau and John Dewey whilst also explaining why group rights are necessarily collectivist in scope. Once the connection between identity politics and intersectionality with collectivism is made clear, I will then appeal to historical precedents of past authoritarian regimes as an illustration to show what the problems of collectivism actually are. After establishing the problems of collectivism and how it works in tandem with group rights, I will try to offer a better political model from a more individualistic political worldview such as classical liberalism in order to prove many of the issues raised in intersectional and identity politics related circles can be solved through a classical liberal approach to politics.

If we are to ascertain a better understanding of what identity politics and intersectionality mean, then we should define them from the point of view of those who find use with them. If we can gather a point of view from advocates of their usage, we can gather a point of view from those who potentially *think* in the appliance of identity politics and intersectionality. Most importantly, we can define identity politics and intersectionality on their followers terms.

The term intersectionality was not first *used* in the 1980's. However, the 1980's was the decade in which the term was given its historical significance through black feminist Kimberle Crenshaw. The term was used by Crenshaw in her book *Demarginalizing the Intersection of race and Sex: a Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and*

*Antiracist Politics*¹ to illustrate the supposed marginalization/discrimination that black women were subjected to when applying for work at General Motors. Black men were often designated work on the assembly line whereas white women were often designated office work (usually as secretaries). When the black women tried taking General Motors to court, the court ruled in favour of General Motors on the grounds the company could claim they hired both *black people* and *women*. What Crenshaw saw in this legal dispute was a way in which two forms of social identity (black and female) crossed paths in order to form a byproduct of unique marginalisation. This would become her primary example of what intersectionality actually is. Intersectionality, in effect, is the illustration of how an individual can receive authentic forms of social oppression based on two or more of their interacting social identities. The situation(s) in which the two or more social identities produce a form of oppression/marginalisation is where the two or more social identities 'intersect'. Another example of intersectional identities clashing with one another could be black women caught between feminism and black advocacy groups. The emphasis on western feminism may focus primarily upon stereotypes specific to white upper class women and such an attempt to iconoclastically dismantle said stereotypes may leave all the stereotypes of black women in its wake. The line of reasoning could be applied to black advocacy groups. For example, a black advocacy group may focus upon how black men are perceived as violent, criminal aggressors while neglecting stereotypes of black women as being, 'bitchy'.

So we can, in part, think of intersectionality as an illustration of the problems individuals with two or more forms of identity may face in a given situation. Yet the term is nowhere near as broad as just a series of conflicting social identities which can be affected systemically in a variety of different social situations. The term can be broken down into smaller parts which relate to a different context within the umbrella of intersectionality. The main three are listed below from Crenshaw's *Mapping the Margins*²

Structural:

Social institutions have wielded results which were not initially intended by the institution itself. These unintended results often go on to marginalize intersectional identities like in the examples above. Structural intersectionality seems to be the form of intersectionality most commonly used in intellectual discussion. The structural definition of intersectionality is generally based on the naivety of potentially well meaning institutions not having accommodated for the existence of certain intersectional groups.

Political:

Again, Crenshaw gives a good example of political intersectionality above with the schism of black women caught between black advocacy groups and feminism. Political intersectionality therefore, is when social activist groups wishing to politicize gender, sexuality, ethnicity and race leave out certain members based on the intersection of said member's multiple social identities.

¹ Crenshaw, Kimberle, University of Chicago Legal Forum, p. 143

² Crenshaw Kimberle, *Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics and Violence Against Women of Colour*,

Political intersectionality is more of an internal struggle within groups, between members, rather than a series of criticisms projected outside onto the wider general public.

Representational:

A means by which certain group based stereotypes are overlooked in moving beyond harmful labels for the group as a whole. Not all the members of a social group are marginalized symbolically in the same manner. Many are given different attributes despite being part of the same social group and in the case of representational intersectionality, the ways in which the forms of identity may intersect could be seen as sideline issues in the wider context of said social group/community.

Identity politics by contrast, is an attempt to move away from conventional politics such as party politics or belief systems and instead, focus on groups within society. The goal is to challenge the dominant conception of a group within a wider societal framework. In many ways, the reason intersectionality could be spoken of, in the same political/social circles as identity politics, is because one could argue intersectionality is a useful tool in the application of identity politics for groups who *have* multiple marginalized identities. While identity politics is a type of politics in and of itself, intersectionality could be one method in which said politics is applied.

Yet, identity politics does not just apply to intersectional groups and can apply to most racial, gender-based, ethnic or sexually orientated groups. In Sonia Kruk's *Retrieving Experience: Subjectivity and Recognition in Feminist Politics*³, identity politics is described as an attempt to reclaim various identities on the terms of those who had them removed within a given society. The hegemony of a dominant group which has either neglected certain non-dominant social groups or outright denied the identity of said non-dominant groups is challenged in order for the non-dominant social group to reclaim their own identity. As Kruk herself claims, 'it is qua women, it is qua blacks, it is qua lesbians'. Though Kruk's definition of identity politics is a fairly adequate one, in order to better understand the long-term goals of identity politics we should understand *how* and *why* certain social groups feel as though their identities have, in part, been taken. If we are to assume western culture to be hegemonic over the rest of the world like Taiaiake Alfred in *Peace, Power and Righteousness: An Indigenous Manifesto*⁴, cultures distinct to said western hegemony, may have lost part of their own culture through western dominance. Such cultures may wish to reclaim their traditional value systems by seeking the origins of a forgotten past. A working example of Alfred's definition could be pre-colonial and pre-imperial Africa, in which many black Americans or black Europeans could have been the descendents of slaves. If so, said descendents may wish to rediscover their national identity before they were placed in a foreign country with a different set of cultural values. Another, less decolonial example could be, the gay community perhaps trying to reclaim what it means to a man within a dominantly straight world.

³ Kruk Sonia, *Retrieving Experience: Subjectivity and Recognition in Feminist Politics*, 2001, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press

⁴ Alfred, Taiaiake, *Peace, Power and Righteousness: An Indigenous Manifesto*, Oxford: Oxford University Press

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Both identity politics and intersectionality share group rights and collectivism in common. Additionally, group rights are necessary in order to establish collectivism. So in order to explain how identity politics and intersectionality fit the category of group rights, which in turn rests under the heading of collectivism, we need some understanding of what collectivism itself means. A good basis for the meaning of the term collectivism can be found within John Dewey's *The Ethics of Democracy*⁵, with the following quote,

‘Society in its unified and structural character is the fact of the case; the non-social individual is an abstraction arrived at by imagining what man would be if all his human qualities were taken away. Society, as a real whole, is the normal order, and the mass as an aggregate of isolated units is the fiction’.

What we find in Dewey is not just one of many descriptions of an individual but also a metaphysical basis for collectivism. Societies are, ‘unified’ and each constituent part of said unity, having an, ‘isolated’ purpose is fictional. The mass is taken here to be the real existence of a given society. Whatever the, ‘normal order’ of the people is, well and truly reflects what the society in question is.

However, for a clearer and more in depth understanding of what collectivism really is, we should look towards political philosophers such as Jean Jacques Rousseau. In *On the Social Contract with Geneva Transcript and Political Economy*⁶ in which each part (individual) of a given community, group, aggregate has to be moved forcibly to fall in line with the interests of the whole (the collective). For Rousseau this was a universal rule of political life which could not be broken. Rousseau moves from this way of collectivist thinking to put complete trust into the state and goes as far to suggest the state, if acting on behalf of the collective good, has every right to kill its own citizens if killing said citizens is thought expedient with the shared common goal.

Under a collectivist mindset, what makes a person's identity is not achieved through, ‘the self’ or through any level of introspection but through said person's bearing on a group. In short, the group defines the individual. In many ways, the dependence upon the interest of the group over the individual perfectly explains why group rights and collectivism fit together.

Group rights (also known as collective rights) are rights that are commonly shared among a group itself. Whatever links the group together on a contextual level is exclusive to said group in ascertaining new rights. An example of group rights could be abortion rights for women. A problem specific to women as a group.

Where identity politics links in with collectivism is through the definitions used. If we are to accept Kruk's notion of identity politics, we find that it fits perfectly with Dewey's understanding

⁵ Dewey, John, *The Ethics of Democracy*, in *The Early Works of John Dewey, Volume 1, 1882-1898*, edited by Jo Ann

⁶ Rousseau, Jacques Jean, *On the Social Contract with Geneva Transcript and Political Economy*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1978, p. 43, 44

of collectivism. In order to be, 'qua women' one has to view women as a group in and of itself. Since the term woman, is itself a term commonly shared by individuals with a certain group identity. This could be what Dewey means by the, 'mass'. The same goes if we are to proclaim identity politics is, 'qua blacks' the language is loaded with grouping a set of individuals together under a common abstract form of identity such as *black*. Even if we are to add on Alfred's understanding of identity politics we run into the same collectivised set of categories. In order to reclaim the meaning of the term woman or black, we have to reclaim forms of identity related to specific groups. What this means for identity politics or any form of politics wishing to base its foundations on shared notions of identity is they cannot avoid speaking of such forms of identity outside of collectives.

Though intersectionality is supposed to be a way of expressing individual marginalization and/or oppression, intersectionality still manages to find itself loaded with the same collectivist language. The only difference between intersectionality and identity politics here is there are two or more forms of group identity at play. In Crenshaw's case, the concept of, 'being black' and, 'being a woman' are still group based. The group identity of a black woman may be distinct from other notions of womanhood but the identity still remains as an intersection *between* the two groups.

This is why both intersectionality and identity politics manifest themselves through group rights. In order to protect the rights of a certain demographic within a population, those rights have to be protected in the context of a group.

However, there would be no need to chastise intersectionality and identity politics for simply being bedfellows with collectivism and in turn, group rights unless we understand what the problems of collectivism actually are. The problems of collectivism can best be explained historically. The term 'collectivism' has been linked to many ideologies which had specific significance in the last century ranging from Communism, Socialism and Nationalism.

In Richard Overy's *Dictators*⁷ we are given a glimpse of what a citizen is like living under a collectivist based society. According to Overy, the official newspaper for the Communist Party within the Soviet Union, pravda, propagandised the idea of what they called the new soviet man. The philosophy behind the new soviet man was to reject his innate personality and see himself merely as soviet. He would be predispositioned to do whatever the collective good wanted him to do including dying for the collective good. His rights in this sense, are everybody else's rights as a group. Whatever the group wants, he must do at his own expense; seeing as he is a member. If the ultimate goal of a given society is the collective good and the method by which this good is achieved is by removing each citizen's, 'innate identity' then it does not seem far fetched to see how the Soviet Union could justify the atrocities it committed over the last century. For instance, according to military historian Earl F. Ziemke in his book *Stalingrad to Berlin the German Defeat in the East*⁸, the Soviet Union seemed to have no issue with creating

⁷ Overy, Richard, *Dictators*, Published in New York, Publisher Allen Lane, p. 258

⁸ Ziemke, F. Earl, *Stalingrad to Berlin, the German Defeat in the East*, Office of the Military History U.S Army 1968, p. 500

heavy losses of their own troops during the German invasion. It should not seem particularly arbitrary that a society which, like Dewey proclaims, treats the individual as a metaphysical abstraction for the sake of the 'aggregate' found over 470,000 casualties from one battle alone an acceptable number.

Again, we can look towards fascism in Germany as a prime example of the problems of collectivism. More so, in terms of ingroups and outgroups. Not all groups share common aims nor common attributes. In a collective, those who share similarities will naturally want to be among each other and specify a preference. These people become the ingroup. The outgroup is any existing persons not in the initial perceived group. In the case of Nazi Germany, the ingroup being anyone of Germanic heritage while the outgroup could be anybody ranging from Jews, Gypsies, Gays or Communists. Studies have shown that when the ingroup becomes so tightly strung together, the ingroup does not just keep out those who it perceives unwelcome but actively despises and discriminates against them. Often denoting less than reputable characteristics onto them.

I think the best case that can be made against the collectivism of Nazi Germany in this instance comes from philosopher/writer Ayn Rand in an extract from *Textbook of Americanism*⁹ which reads the following, 'the greatest good for the greatest number, one of the most vicious slogans ever foisted by humanity' alongside, 'There were 70 million Germans in Germany and 600,00 Jews. The greatest number (the Germans) supported the Nazi government which told them that their greatest good would be served by exterminating the smaller number (the Jews) and grabbing their property'. In Rand's view here, whatever is perceived to be good is not done so on a numerical basis. The amount of people to agree or even for the whole people to agree unanimously, does not equate to the right set of moral actions; as is the case with Nazi Germany.

Taking more so from Rousseau's understanding of collectivism, we see how a trust in the state as the collective will of the people, has actually been the justification for previous fascist governments from the last century, such as fascist Italy. For both Benito Mussolini and Giovanni Gentili (fascist political philosopher) the state is actually supposed to be the genuine essence of the individual. Both Mussolini and Gentili were very clear in their collaborative paper *The Doctrine of Fascism*¹⁰ with their claim that liberal models of government had sacrificed the state in the name of the individual. What they wished to offer instead was a political doctrine which would reassert the state at the expense of the individual. To say both Mussolini and Gentili were anti-individualistic in this regard would be an understatement since both believed outside of the state (the essence of the individual), no set of values could exist. Again, like Rousseau and Dewey, there is an emphasis on a mass group, be it the state, an aggregate or a collective becoming metaphysically real while the isolated citizens who make the said state, aggregate or

⁹ Rand, Ayn, *Textbook of Americanism*, in the Ayn Rand Column (New Milford, CT: Second Renaissance Books, 1998) p, 90

¹⁰ Mussolini, Benito, Gentili, Giovanni, 1932,

<http://www.worldfuturefund.org/wffmaster/Reading/Germany/mussolini.htm>

collective what it is, to be irrelevant. To a certain degree, state as a form of conscious being, made of individuals denied their individual rights, is the ultimate form of group rights.

These are the historical precedents for how collectivism as a political philosophy has manifested itself. They have always and always will be *designed* to negate the rights of the individuals who comprise them. This is why both identity politics and intersectionality should be viewed with scepticism, since neither can escape the philosophies of collectivism/group rights and the argument *for* collectivist/group rights based societies does not have history working in their favour.

If we are to agree collectivism has wielded such negative results and individualist philosophies are on the other end of the dichotomy, why specifically classical liberalism? Political philosophies such as anarchism or libertarianism also offer a philosophy of individualism. However, the issue with both philosophies here is both are anti-state. Though classical liberalism is sceptical of state power leading towards governments such the ones described by Gentilli, Mussolini, Dewey and Rousseau, it does recognise a place for the state in the lives of individuals. Individuals still need institutions to uphold their level of freedom. For instance, economist Friedrich Hayek argued in *The Constitution of Liberty*¹¹ that some state provision should be made for the most poor members of a given society in order to uphold their freedom. Hayek was talking in terms of safety nets. As a working hypothetical, we could imagine an individual so ill-stricken they cannot work nor can they pay for their treatment. Societies which completely distrust the state would not be able to put laws in place for the benefit of such an individual. In fact, in such societies, due to said individual's ailments, they would not be free.

Returning momentarily to thinkers such as Dewey, Rousseau and Gentilli, the problem with their take on what makes a society is the metaphysics is the wrong way round. Individuals are not metaphysical abstractions, rather groups and collectives are. This is why individualistic political philosophies are of the utmost importance when detecting the issues with collectivist based ideas. The reason for this is because individualist philosophies are opposite to collectivism by definition. Individualist philosophies such as Classical liberalism exist under a broad set of ideas and admittedly, there are disagreements between proponents of classical liberalism with what it means to even be *classically liberal*. Yet here are some of the ideas which are fundamental to the political philosophy which are followed by all of its advocates from Eamonn Butler's *Classical Liberalism: A Prima* alongside their differing approach to intersectional and identity politics related problems.

Individual Sovereignty:

As explained above, where the collectivists fall into error is to assume the collective to be above the individual. To assume the collective is a metaphysical base for how people exist. In contrast, Classical Liberalism starts from the proposition that the individual is the fundamental basis for

¹¹ Hayek, Friedrich, *The Constitution of Liberty*, University of Chicago Press, 1960 p. 405

human existence. In fact, one of the reasons *for* collectives often being criticised on the grounds that all groups/collectives can be stratified down to the individual comes from a classical liberal approach to methodological individualism. According to methodological individualism, the entire existence of a collective is predicated by the individuals who comprise it.

Also, individuals will always find disagreements with one another. Be it Hobbesian self interest or Kantian individual happiness, individuals will never unilaterally agree. What fears the classical liberal tradition about the collective approach to organising society is the group with the majority interest will become the group who can will power at the expense of the minority. By allowing individuals to live their lives free from state intervention on the premise that each individual's rights is protected allows for all citizens to have their freedom. Whereas allowing the state to be ran via collectives/groups could allow certain groups to gain rights at the expense of the freedom of others.

As I mentioned prior, no society agrees perfectly once said society is stratified down to its individual base and as we already know, identity politics with its vast array of groups has subgroups within its existing groups who hold reservations within the group itself. Not all women think and act the same nor do all black people nor does anybody from any particular group. What individual sovereignty does in this regard is value individuals by their individual merits and not as a constituent member of their group. Individuals can freely choose what their identity means to them without feeling like they need to be part of some group mentality.

Limited Governmental Power:

Collectivism usually, over the course of history, has resulted in large governments. Classical liberals are in agreement in part with the collectivist based ideologies that the state should have the monopoly over violence. The state needs the monopoly on violence to uphold the individual freedom of its local citizenry. Yet the disagreement comes from how extensive the powers of the government should be. There are two reasons to keep the government relatively small; the government can remain accountable and the governmental will not supersede the freedom of its individual citizens. Collectivism requires individuals to sacrifice their individual freedom to the state in order to reach the aspired goal the state has in mind. By subjugating individuals to the state, the state loses its accountability since citizens may lose the freedom to protest the state itself. States built around individualism still allow for citizens to have the freedom to criticise the state and thus allow for the state to be held accountable. An example of this could be free press; not government owned.

Under collectivist governments, each citizen must work towards a common goal and the state micromanages the citizens in order to propagate said goal. Under a classical liberal modal, there is a plurality of aspirations among the local citizenry which is recognised. Once recognised and put into practice, the state should only put forward laws which allow for each individual to freely choose their own pursuits uninterrupted.

The government should not be able to reach a point in which it extends different rights for different citizens. If everybody is to be treated equally then there can be no two tiered system. An example could be the BBC in which there is racial discrimination towards white people working within research facilities¹². It might be in part, that the reason the BBC can get away with doing this is because they are government owned. If the government have a monopoly over a media institution then it becomes hard for the government to remain accountable through the media.

Rule of law applied equally:

Regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, class or ideology, the rule of law is applied to citizens indiscriminately. Laws are to be made for all individuals to follow and not exclusively to certain groups. There can be no social or cultural biases in place when dealing with legal matters. In order to achieve all of the following, the judicial system must stand on its own merit and not be influenced by any person, including in some instances, the government.

A common complaint in intersectionality and identity politics is the discrimination which certain groups may face. Under an evenly applied rule of law pertaining to each individual, the rule of law should look beyond race, gender, ethnicity, class or sexual orientation. Again, the individual would be assessed on their personal character and not by their group characteristics.

Toleration:

Though each citizen has to be held equally under the rule of law, the differences of each individual are for the most part accepted. For instance, the right to free speech. Not all citizens within a community will agree but all have the right to speak their mind in an open dialogue. Individuals can, if they want to, form groups which can become integral to a community such as clubs or services.

The differences are not found on a group by group basis rather an individual basis. Again, ingroup fighting can be avoided if the groups themselves recognise that their group is made up of individual constituent parts. The issues of intersectionality, within which groups will inevitably clash can be avoided since individuals can manifest their own destiny.

Negative Liberty:

Much of what has been discussed so far in reference to classical liberalism is in the context of wanting to be left to one's devices. Negative liberty is effectively freedom from something rather than the freedom *for* something. All citizens have the freedom *from* slavery for instance.

Civil Society:

¹² <https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/670266/BBC-advert-white-people-ethnic-equality-staff-job-internship>

Classical liberals do recognise that in order for a society to function, it cannot be wholly individualist, realistically speaking. This did in fact become a problem for one of the schools of thought dependent upon classical liberalism and methodological individualism; the Austrian school. Hence why advocates such as Carl Menger explicitly stressed in his work *Investigations into the Method of the Social Sciences with Special Reference to Economics*¹³ how individualism could be broken down with an atomistic method. This is why Ayn Rand's philosophy though individualistic in scope, is not suited for a functioning society. Like the atomists of the Austrian school, Rand does not take into account the social conventions which individuals find themselves a part of. In part, each person relies on somebody else in order to live. On a metaphysical level, the individual may be the fundamental element of a society but by no means can individuals live entirely on their own. They are still reliant to an extent upon family or shared sense of community for instance.

Hence why there is an emphasis on freedom of association. In order for society to remain civil it is important the citizens freely associate as groups rather than under a governmental rule of law. This helps to promote a sense of community, family values, self help groups and clubs. Individuals do not feel pressured to be a part of a group based on their characteristics but choose to do so with free association.

In closing, due to an appeal to history, there is every reason for modern political thinkers/theorists to be wary of both identity politics and intersectionality since both promote group rights and collectivism in practice. By definition, to be concerned with identities such as gender, ethnicity, race, sexual orientation and class in relation to rights is to be concerned with group rights. Groups rights, as already explained, are, collective rights. Collectivism as a political philosophy should be rejected for two reasons. Firstly, collectivism has no moral leg to stand on due to how adherents of the philosophy have already applied it within the last century such as the Socialist/Communist politics of the Soviet Union and the Nationalist politics of Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany. Secondly, the internal logic within a collectivist framework, which all collectivist ideologies seem to follow, necessitates these results each time. A good political philosophy to govern a given people should always put the individual above the collective indiscriminately, to prevent tension within ingroups, to prevent sacrificing members of the ingroup for the sake of the group's goals and, to prevent outgroups from being abused within a given populace. Such a political philosophy can be found with classical liberalism with its emphasis on individual rights over collective rights. Classical liberalism can allow tolerance of individual differences between citizens, an ability to assess people by their individual merits (not their group membership), apply the law equally among all members of a society regardless of their group status, to leave them alone and not force them into groups based on their shared attributes whilst simultaneously allowing for them to have freedom of association to form bonds with other members of their shared society.

¹³ Menger, Carl, *Investigations into the Method of the Social Sciences with Special Reference to Economics*, 2009, Auburn AL, Ludwig von Mises Institute, 93

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