

# Building a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Social Science: Themes from 19<sup>th</sup> Century British Cooperative Thought

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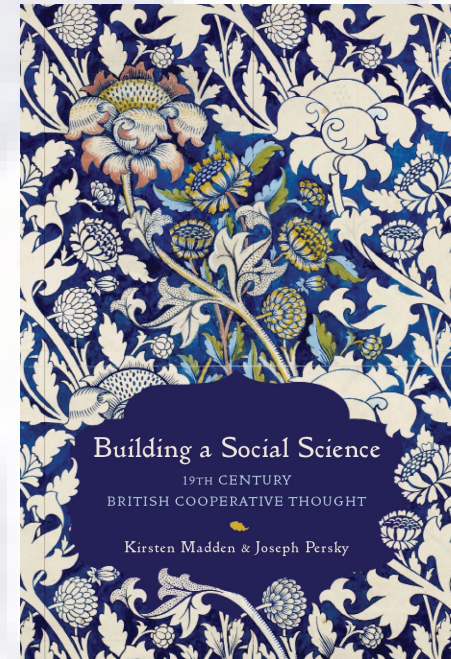
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# Economic Thought in Response to the Industrial Revolution

- Adam Smith's followers constructed their classical political economy around a world of scarcity populated by selfish actors
- Their emphasis on scarcity is ironic since the Industrial Revolution and continuing technological change promise a world rich with possibilities
- In contrast, the first British cooperative writers postulate a new super abundance created by actors capable of an enlarged self-interest

# 19<sup>th</sup> Century Cooperative Thought in Britain

- Our book claims these cooperative thinkers built the “first social science”
- Intellectual Sources
  - Robert Owen
  - William Thompson & Anna Doyle Wheeler
  - Christian Socialists
  - John Stuart Mill & Harriet Taylor Mill
  - JTW Mitchell and Consumer Cooperators
  - Women’s Cooperative Guild
  - William Morris
  - GDH Cole and the Guild Socialists
- The book attempts to reconstruct this social science: its social psychology, institutions, and theory as well as its programmatics of transition



- In this presentation we drop the historical setting and turn to a synthesis of the implications of their science for the 21<sup>st</sup> century
- A progressive social science needs to focus not only on critiquing the mainstream theory of economics, but also on building a scientifically sound alternative that consistently draws on our better selves
- The bulk of this talk presents an (ambitious) skeletal structure for a full-fledged cooperative economic theory
- Note: We only touch on the deep problem of transition at the very end

# Outline

- Fundamentals of Cooperation
  - Defining cooperation
  - The social psychology and institutions of cooperative systems
  - Positive self-reinforcing mechanisms
- Social Psychology
  - Plasticity
  - Enlarged self-interest
- Institutions
  - Principled
  - Concrete
- Outcomes
  - Superabundance
  - Happiness
  - Human development
- Critiques
- Transition

A definition from the early British  
cooperative thinkers....

**Cooperation:**

the voluntary and cordial working together of  
large numbers of people

with productive capital held in common,  
democratic self-management and full equality

# Social Psychology:

the intentional construction of an enlarged self-interest

- Plasticity in character formation is the most central assumption
- Cooperative society builds its educational system on this key assumption and the importance of early positive experience with a communal outlook
- Enlarged self-interest continually broadens the inclination of fellow feeling in everyday activity
- As individuals mature, cooperative institutions reinforce this outlook

# Institutional Principles

- Liberty: voluntarism and self-governance
  - Importance of exit and entrance elsewhere into the system
- Equality
- Fellowship
- Social responsibility
- Creative engagement



# Concrete Institutions

- Common property
- Universal cooperative education
- Worker associations: participation in work, decision making, management
- Consumer associations
- Civic associations with worker and public interests
- Some sort of federal structure across these local entities

# Distribution

- The cooperative society faces a question of how exactly goods and services should be distributed
- In smaller more self-sufficient communities the principle might be “take as one needs”
- In a larger urban setting, distribution might proceed through a system of warehouses accepting labor notes
- Industrial and post-industrial systems build around pricing at full labor costs including externalities

The diagram consists of two large circles. The left circle contains the text 'The Coop System: Enlarged Self Interest \* Cooperative Institutions'. The right circle contains the text '(D) Human Development', '(S) Superabundance', and '(H) Happiness'. A thick black curved arrow points from the top of the left circle to the top of the right circle, with the word 'Outcomes' written above it.

Outcomes

The  
Coop System:

Enlarged Self Interest  
\*

Cooperative  
Institutions

(D) Human  
Development

(S) Superabundance

(H) Happiness

# A Warning/Heads up

- Going to present several lists now that suggest the richness of arguments for the causal connections between the cooperative system and its outcomes
- Each list is made up of attributes (or finer habits and norms plausibly derived from the interactions of the social psychology and the primary institutions of the cooperative system)
- Each attribute plays a role in achieving a specific outcome
- Unfortunately, we won't have time to clarify all of these attributes (nor the groundwork done by the cooperative theorists for each, nor the major work still remaining for a 21<sup>st</sup> century theory of cooperation)

# Attributes of the Cooperative System Promoting Superabundance

- Full employment and quick rebalancing of surpluses (Owen, Thompson & Cole)
- Gender equality (Owen, Wheeler & Thompson)
- Racial equality (Mill?)
- Moderation and pleasure in work (Owen)
- Healthy labor (Owen)
- Reduced conflict and pilfering (Owen)
- Intrinsic rewards from producing well for others (Owen, Mitchell & Cole)
- Latest and best machinery (Owen, Mill)
- High productive L/unproductive L (Owen)
- Security in labor's full claim to product (Wheeler and Thompson)

# Attributes of the Cooperative System Promoting Happiness

- Expanded fellowship (Morris)
- Reduced interpersonal pain generation (Thompson)
- Erosion of the “false pleasures” (Thompson)
- Enhanced pleasures of sympathy and intelligence (Thompson)
- Normalization of industriousness, enhancing social respect (Thompson)
- Pleasure from responsibility, initiative, community service (WCG, Cole)
- Gender equality (Wheeler)
- Machinery designed to make work more pleasant (Owen, Cole, Morris)
- High labor pleasure to pain ratio (Morris, Cole)

# Attributes of the Cooperative System Promoting Human Development

- Popular Art and emphasis on creativity in work (Morris)
- Education (development of reasoning and of ethics) (Owen, Morris)
- Mutually supportive social relations and self-governance (Morris, Cole)
- Task variety and moderation (Owen, Cole)
- Availability of public goods (Owen, Cole)
- Benevolence leading to tolerance, inclusion and foresight (Owen, Thompson)

Outcomes

Enlarged Self Interest

\*

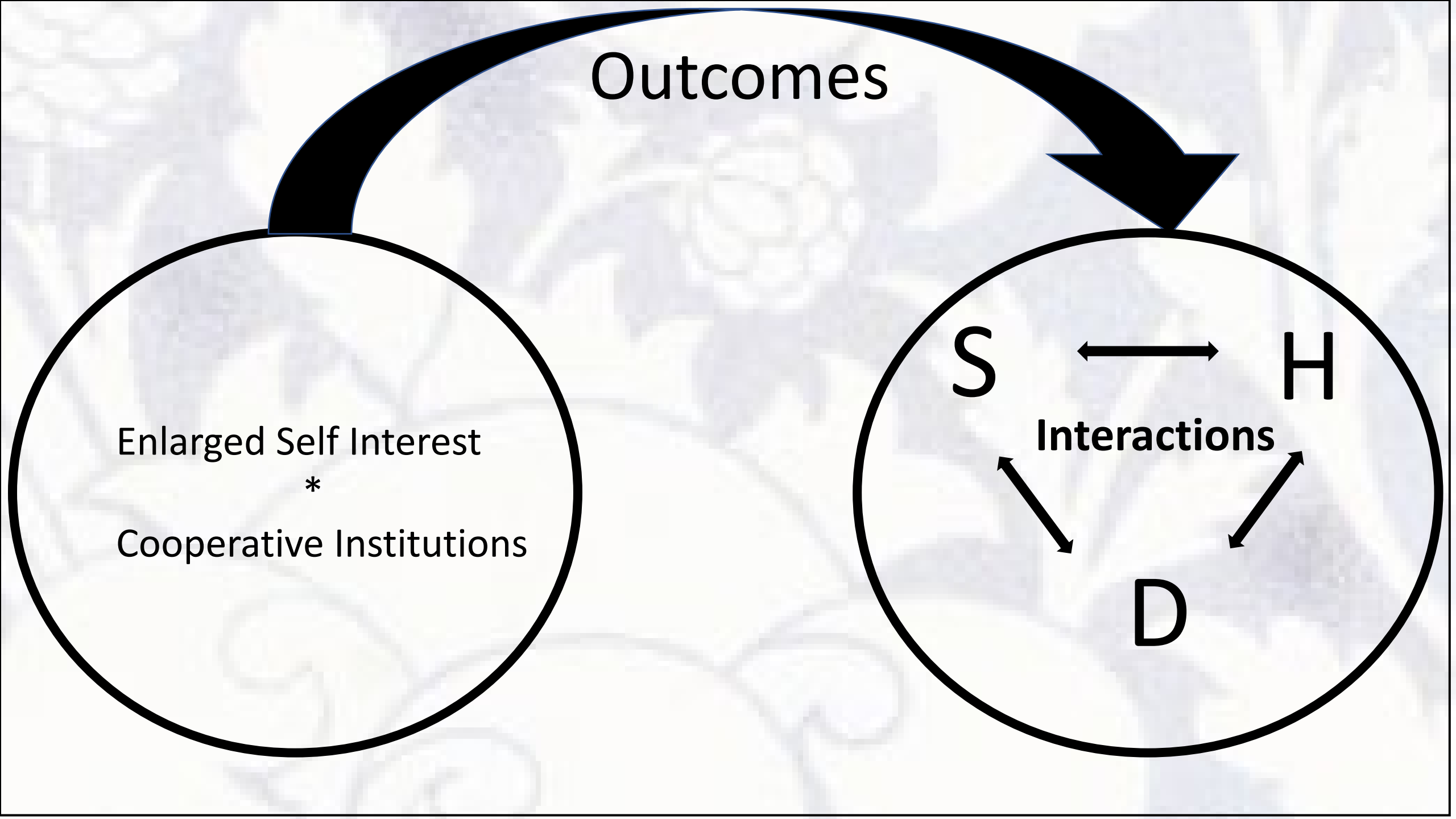
Cooperative Institutions

S

H

Interactions

D



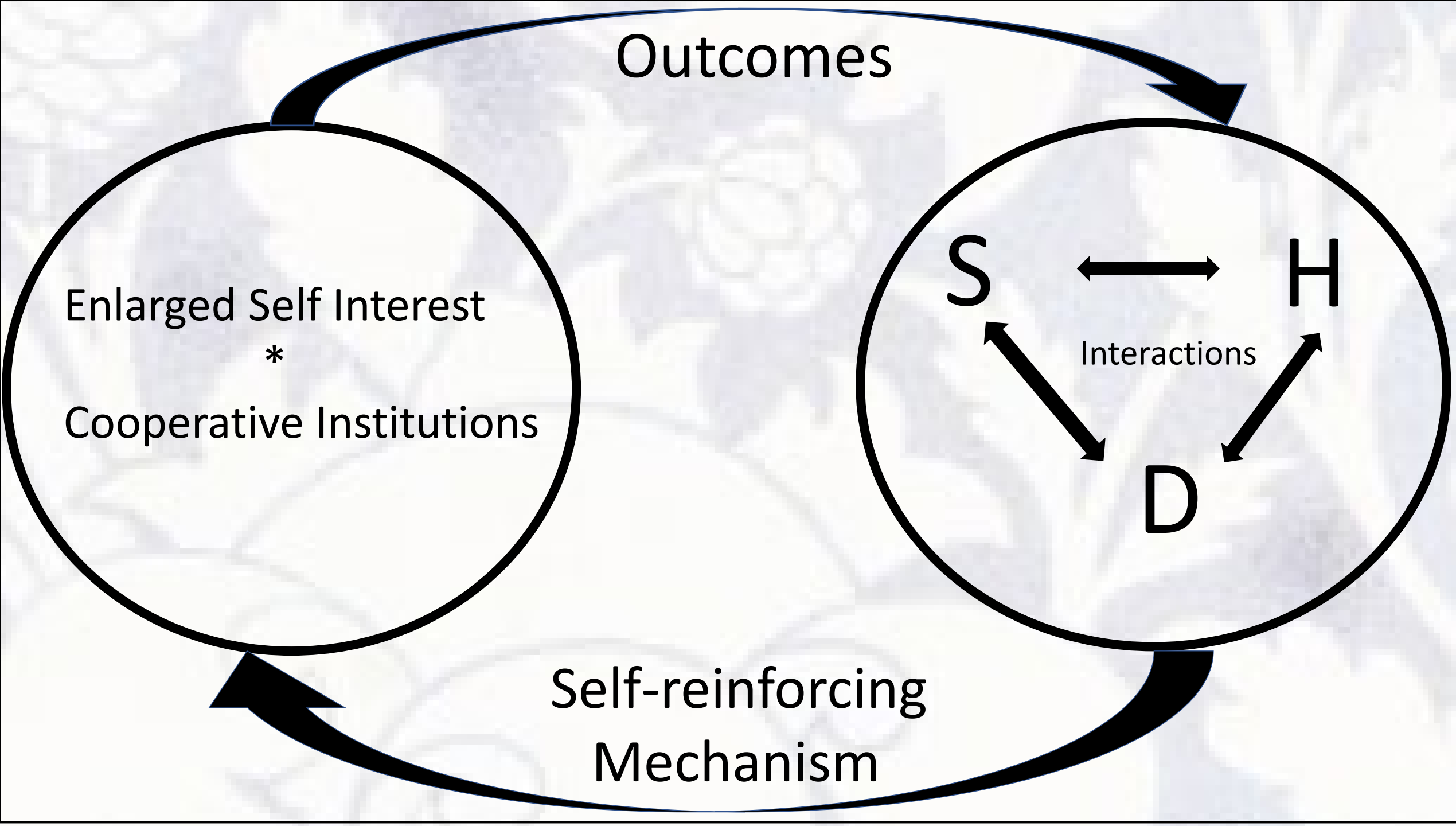


# Positive Interactions among the Outcomes

- Superabundance -> ample provisioning and happiness
- Happiness (especially at work) -> greater worker engagement and superabundance
- Happiness -> encourages education, sociality and human development
- Human development -> a focus on higher pleasures and hence happiness
- Superabundance -> moderate labor and greater human development
- Human development -> greater innovation and superabundance

# A Fundamental Cooperative Proposition

Cooperative outcomes strengthen and reinforce the commitment to enlarged self interest and to cooperative institutions



# A Research Agenda for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Cooperative Thought

- Developing the logic and empirics of the connections between attributes and outcomes
- Exploring the two-way interactions between outcomes
- Creating a full theory of the self-reinforcing mechanism

Some big questions if these thoughts are to be built into a plausible theory for the 21<sup>st</sup> century

- Is human plasticity enough to constructively limit antipathy and build enlarged self-interest?
- Have cooperative theorists overestimated the interest and willingness to participate in self-governance?
- Can the system effectively manage the transfer of capital from shrinking activities to expanding ones?
- Can a cooperative system find constructive outlets for young people's wanderlust?
- How do we get there from here?

# Transition in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Context

- Social psychology: constructively developing enlarged self-interest out of selfishness
  - Transforming public education
  - Replacing selfish incentives in the workplace (beginning with leadership positions)
  - Undermining selfishness in the household
- Institutions: turning unions, non-profits and corporations into cooperatives
  - Attracting and socializing a corps of democratic leadership
  - Committing to replacing hierarchy with mutual association
- Three thorny issues in transition
  - How to win broad appeal and consent?
  - How to reverse engineer gender, racial and other oppressions in transition?
  - In larger societies must cooperation be built on forcible redistribution from the wealthy?