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A Heartfelt Tribute to My Good Friend Hans

Thomas Jacob

Thomas Jacob studied economics at Zurich University, was a Swissair airline pilot and now works in the insurance sector. In 1981 he became a Randian Minarchist and in 1990 a Hoppean Anarchist. He has four children and lives with his wife and the two younger ones in Zurich, Switzerland.

Dear Hans,

My contribution has three goals. Firstly, I want to tell you why you mean so much to me, also on behalf of my wife. In addition, my personal experiences are representative of similar stories that friends and acquaintances have told me. Secondly, I want to entertain those readers who know you already, and thirdly, I want to introduce newcomers to the spirit of your ideas.

We met for the first time in July 1990 in Stanford, California, at Mises University. Your explanations on praxeology and the ethics of argumentation were clear, logically razor-sharp, and immediately comprehensible with the necessary concentration. Your accent made the whole thing even more likeable for me as a Swiss-German. It was a revelation for me. I realized that I was about to clarify the most urgent question that plagued and frustrated me after ten years in an Ayn Rand Objectivist bubble, namely: how can freedom be justified in a watertight manner?

Your brilliant answer: the a priori of argumentation, the ethics of argumentation.[[1]](#footnote-1) It is unsurpassable in its elegance, at least as I understand it, and my understanding is as follows: Freedom cannot be denied argumentatively without entering a “performative contradiction”; freedom is a prerequisite for the possibility of speaking about freedom. And this freedom must also include the possibility of being able to physically conduct and maintain a conversation; in other words, it demands the right of ownership of one’s own body and of all legally acquired goods.

Why has your idea not conquered political philosophy? As you like to put it: “The difference between a minarchist and an anarcho-capitalist is half an hour of unbiased and disciplined thinking.” It seems that few people are willing and able to make that effort.[[2]](#footnote-2) Another reason is that accepting your conclusions would make the majority of political science and ethics departments in universities irrelevant and redundant. It is the same reason why economics departments all but ignore Austrian Economics—and why you will never win a Nobel Prize.[[3]](#footnote-3)

After Stanford, I immediately began to record your books—at that time still mainly in German—on cassettes and to listen to them over and over. After all, I had to overwrite decades of statist brainwashing. Reading books on cassette was a habit I had cultivated since the invention of the Sony Walkman. Here’s a little anecdote that illustrates the pros and cons of progress: shortly after I had read Mises’s *Human Action* and Rothbard’s *Man, Economy and State* on about 30 cassettes each, the Mises Institute made them available, read by my favorite narrator, Jeff Riggenbach, free to download. I threw these and many other cassettes away with only a bit of melancholy.

The decade of the 90’s was filled with excitement and fun. As an airline pilot, I had a lot of free time for studies plus opportunities to visit you in Las Vegas. You in turn found a base for your visits to Europe in Zurich. I vividly remember numerous days and nights with the warmest feelings and a lot of smiles. During this time, I began to be impressed and inspired by your stoic composure in the face of the madness of political reality and your confident and uncompromising argumentation in all kinds of conversations.

Example one, a Mont Pélerin Society event in Cannes. If I remember correctly, it was about commenting on a lecture by a statist educationalist. You knew exactly what it would have taken for you to be admitted to the Society, but such a betrayal of principle was never in your cards. You entered the fray with a mischievous delight in provocation, Groucho Marx’s dictum came to mind: “I refuse to join any club that would have me as a member.”

Example two, a philosophers’ conference in Austria, again from my memory. It was a packed event and it was, needless to say, a left-wing audience. It became and remained dead quiet during your presentation; you seemed to sense that the audience was being challenged and allowed itself to be challenged. You must have sensed this too, because at the time of the question and answer session, you seemed satisfied and amused and wanted a glass of white wine instead of water. For me, it was an impressive example of how uncompromising arguments can impress even die-hard opponents, if not win them over.

Example three. Your first lecture at the invitation of the Swiss think tank “Liberales Institut” took place in the stately house of the Lyceum Club Zurich. You spoke about Robinson Crusoe, about property, about a private law society and compared these ideas with today’s reality. Two venerable former members of the Swiss government sat in the back row. I could literally hear them gasping for air and their question at the end was something like: “How can you even think that!” At a follow-up event, we agreed to return to the same place, but found ourselves in front of closed doors. Honi soit, qui mal y pense. We quickly relocated to the pizzeria around the corner, where we had an unexpected meal in addition to your lecture. Those were the days when your audience fit in a pizzeria…

During all these years you published a flood of books and articles with groundbreaking insights, a creative achievement that further cemented your reputation as the successor of Mises and Rothbard.

The spirit of your work can be found in one of your favorite quotes:

We need intellectual leaders who are prepared to resist the blandishments of power and influence and who are willing to work for an ideal, however small may be the prospects of its early realization. They must be men who are willing to stick to principles and to fight for their full realization, however remote.[[4]](#footnote-4)

For years I was surprised at how unbendingly you argue and how you don’t budge an inch from thoughts that you consider to be right, in the German-Lutheran spirit of “here I stand and can do no other.” Through your example, I have learned that intellectual honesty and a contented, humorous life are not only possible, but complement each other. I was lucky enough to get to know and observe your good friend Murray Rothbard. He too was an inspiration in this respect: razor-sharp and relentless at his desk, the “happy libertarian” late at night over a whiskey.

Perhaps it was Rothbard who inspired you to complement and round off your academic work with a sociable project. Your “Property and Freedom Society,” the PFS, founded in 2006, is, as you once wrote in a review, “a place where likeminded people from around the world could gather regularly in mutual encouragement and in the enjoyment of unrivaled and uncensored intellectual radicalism.” In my humble opinion, the PFS is a stroke of genius and a complete success. You and your wife Gülçin—where would we be without our wives—are warm and dedicated hosts. Each year, you spoil the “Libertarian Marines” from all continents in a beautiful setting in Bodrum, Turkey, or five unforgettable days. It is a huge achievement and deserves special thanks. The event is now fully booked before all the invitations have even been sent out.

One of the secrets of the PFS’s success is undoubtedly and once again your adherence to principle. Right from the start, you insisted on only accepting trustworthy guests approved by you personally. That is why the PFS became one of the rare occasions when guests can speak as they think. It’s a mental spa, an oasis of sanity and an opportunity to debate, laugh and celebrate with kindred spirits. Many guests come to get to know you and the feedback is always the same: “Hans is so approachable, likeable and funny.” The only surprise for me is that this surprises some people.

The PFS is also an impressive testimony to the progress of radical libertarian ideas. In the 1980s, I knew exactly one other person in Switzerland whom I would describe as libertarian. He was and remains a minarchist, but still. There were also the ordoliberals, but they were dying out. Hayek? Perhaps. Rand, Mises or Rothbard? Never heard of them. Admittedly, Europe was still an anarcho-capitalist desert, and the exchange of information was almost unimaginably limited by today’s standards: my orders from the laissez-faire bookstore in New York took 6 to 8 weeks, a phone call to the USA cost a dollar a minute—not adjusted for inflation!

At the end of the nineties, my most important mission in life, namely, to have children, was alive and kicking. You were also a positive factor in this decision. My next goal was to make a contribution to the promotion of freedom.

My first project was a political one, the Gold Coin Initiative. You have allowed me several times to present the progress of the project during off-peak times at the PFS, which always motivated me to reach another milestone. In essence, we want to legalize the production of practically usable gold coins and to safeguard the unrestricted trade and tax exemption of gold in the Swiss constitution. We have unique political opportunities to do this via an initiative to amend the constitution. After being on hold for several years for various reasons, we plan to give the project new momentum.

My next project, *Hoppe Unplugged*, is a collection of quotes from your interviews and speeches.[[5]](#footnote-5) Thanks to your trust, I had a lot of creative freedom. One of the goals was to have a booklet that I could hand out to anyone who asked me: “What is your political conviction?” Since then, I’ve made a habit of using an old Amex advertising slogan: “don’t leave home without it.” It has often proved its worth. On an evening trip on the Zurich streetcar, for example, I overheard a political discussion and finally intervened with the remark: “here, this booklet might interest you.” One of the strangers read the title and said: “Hans Hermann Hoppe? Sure, I know him...”

*Hoppe Unplugged* has already spread many thousands of times over, in print and via downloads and in more and more languages. So far, so good. When I comment to libertarian colleagues that I want the number of copies to have a few more zeros, the answer is often: “Forget it, the potential for anarcho-capitalist ideas is limited to a small percentage of the population.” The German publisher André Lichtschlag once speculated with a wink as to whether we libertarians have a genetic defect. After all, experience shows that most libertarians, when asked how they came to libertarianism, answer: “I’ve always thought this way, libertarian literature has simply confirmed it for me.”

I don’t want to accept this defeatism. Anarcho-capitalism is much clearer, more elegant, more consistent, more peaceful, more productive, more modern and more revolutionary than the worn-out socialist utopias in red, brown or green. It is our fault that the socialists still dominate the imagination of the rebellious youth and the intellectual elites. It is our duty to ensure that Marx is replaced by Rothbard in universities and that instead of T-shirts with Che Guevara, kids wear ones with “Hans Hermann Hoppe, privatize everything!”

Hayek described the issue like this:

We must make the building of a free society once more an intellectual adventure, a deed of courage. What we lack is a liberal Utopia …, [a] truly liberal radicalism …. The main lesson which the true liberal must learn from the success of the socialists is that it was their courage to be Utopian which gained them the support of the intellectuals and therefore an influence on public opinion which is daily making possible what only recently seemed utterly remote.[[6]](#footnote-6)

What could a liberal utopia look like?

Your first impetus was Robinson Crusoe. No matter how supposedly sophisticated the audience is, you often start with Robinson and Friday to illustrate the principles of an anarcho-capitalist society, especially the function of property and scarcity. Then you continue in the spirit of “this is easy to understand, even small children understand it, and yet it has far-reaching consequences….” The subsequent criticism of the current situation is only logical and correct, no matter how biting and rhetorical.[[7]](#footnote-7)

Your second impetus comes from your book *A Theory of Socialism and Capitalism*. The book has essentially the same structure, simply in reverse order. The first part of the book deals with today’s political realities. You dissect the logic of state intervention, precisely, comprehensibly, and exhaustively. Any kind of state intervention leads to less prosperity and moral degradation. Period, and that’s all. The second part solves some of the trickiest questions of a private law society. Both parts together comprise the essence of political science, everything else, in my view, is bells and whistles. To top it off, the book also contains the final nail in the coffin of socialist theories, namely your argumentation ethics.

Your third impetus was a conversation about Covid.

I had been asking myself for years: How can you, in interviews, on podiums or in personal contact, often deliver answers that are ready to print, structured, precise and exhaustive? I found a possible explanation when I asked you what you thought about Covid.[[8]](#footnote-8) You started, once again, with the remark: “in a private law society, it would simply be a question of who I invite to my place and who I go to…” and then you went on to analyze the political reality. Bingo. You start with the stateless solution, as a zero point, so to speak, and the rest follows from the logic of state intervention. Not that I could ever do it as well as you, but this was the moment when the idea of a stateless planet took concrete shape.

At the core of the idea are the two worlds you talk about, the private law society on the one hand and today’s political reality on the other. From this we create a picture with two planets. The first planet is our Earth, including all states, political conflicts and ideologies. Figuratively speaking, we put the Earth in a box, close the lid and put it aside. Now we are free to do some “out of the box” thinking. We imagine a twin planet, copy-paste the earth, including plants, animals and people, but without states, and call it the “OboxPlanet.” Now we can take any political problem and think about how it would be solved on this anarcho-capitalist OboxPlanet. The website www.oboxplanet.com is a “tourist information center” to help visitors get started.

This image of a politically non-binding, imaginary planet can have a powerful and subversive impact. Firstly, pictures say more than words. We can describe life in an anarcho-capitalistic private law society in colorful scenes and engaging stories, without the distracting questions of political feasibility or political interdependencies. Secondly, the OboxPlanet presents itself as a charming intellectual challenge. But all the visitors who have immersed themselves in this virtual reality world can no longer undo their impressions. What has been seen cannot be unseen. At the very least, all visitors will have learned that alternatives are conceivable, and I bet that most of them will never look at real life politics with the same eyes again.

Let’s have some fun and paint an optimistic scenario. Let’s imagine that the OboxPlanet spreads like wildfire. Social media channels present memes and videos, children play video games set on the OboxPlanet, schools have an “OboxPlanet Day” in the curriculum, student organizations offer “OboxPlanet workshops” and universities create chairs for anarcho-captitalism. Step by step, the OboxPlanet is replacing the socialist guiding star. One morning, people wake up, look at politicians and ask themselves: What is going on here? Why am I letting these characters dictate how I should lead my life? Then, poof, the sanction of the victims ends, and the authority of the states vanishes into thin air. Is that realistic? Who knows? Is it possible? Absolutely.

After all, history teaches us that predictions are difficult, especially regarding the future. We have already experienced the unimaginable once, the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. Now, just in time for your 75th birthday, Javier Miley is elected President of Argentina. For me, this is another such sensation. Milei catapults the concept of anarcho-capitalism onto the world political stage and into the headlines of the mainstream media. One of Milei’s dogs is named Murray, in honor of Rothbard—what would he have said about this development?

Milei is not a “minimal state” “Liberallala” libertarian.[[9]](#footnote-9) He follows your call for uncompromising radicalism as a recipe for success, and lo and behold, won a democratic election, including 70% of young voters. He communicates offensively and with positive messages about freedom and capitalism, in fact replacing the socialist guiding star with anarchocapitalism. Is this the beginning of the end of the dominance of socialist dreams?

This closes the circle of my gratitude. Mises University and your lectures at Stanford showed me the way to intellectual clarity and serenity. Your personal behavior provides me with inspiration for my life planning. The PFS is a highlight of every year and the way you argue was the midwife for my projects with which I hope to contribute to more freedom.

Thank you, Hans, for being who you are and thank you, fate, for letting me get to know you.

How would Javier Milei conclude? *Viva la Libertad!* And long live Hans, carajo!!

1. See Kinsella, “Argumentation Ethics and Liberty: A Concise Guide,” *Mises Daily* (May 27, 2011). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. As you have written, “even if the libertarian ethic and argumentative reasoning must be regarded as ultimately justified, this still does not preclude that people will act on the basis of unjustified beliefs either because they don’t know, they don’t care, or they prefer not to know. I fail to see why this should be surprising or make the proof somehow defective. More than this cannot be done by propositional argument.” Hans-Hermann Hoppe, *The Economics and Ethics of Private Property: Studies in Political Economy and Philosophy* (Auburn, Ala.: Mises Institute, 2006 [1993]; www.hanshoppe.com/eepp), pp. 407–408. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. As Gary North said of your mentor. See Gary North,“Why Murray Rothbard Will Never Win the Nobel Prize!”, in Walter Block & Llewellyn H. Rockwell, eds., *Man, Economy, and Liberty: Essays in Honor of Murray N. Rothbard* (Auburn, Ala.: Mises Institute, 1988; https://mises.org/library/book/man-economy-and-liberty-essays-honor-murray-n-rothbard). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. F. A. Hayek, “The Intellectuals and Socialism,” *University of Chicago Law Review* 16, no. 3 (1949; https://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/uclrev/vol16/iss3/7/): 417–33, p. 432. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. See https://en.hoppeunplugged.com. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Hayek, “The Intellectuals and Socialism,” p. 432–33. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Of course many thinkers use hypothetical or simplified constructs to isolate and analyze aspects of a phenomenon under consideration. For example, other than Robinsonades, Hans uses the (unrealistic) hypothetical of someone other than you being able to directly control your body as part of his argument for self-ownership. See Stephan Kinsella, “Defending Argumentation Ethics,” in *Legal Foundations of a Free Society* (Houston, Texas: Papinian Press, 2023), text at n.38. Hans also hypothesizes the magical and impossible world of the Garden of Eden or the Land of Cockaigne (or Schlaraffenland), in which there is no scarcity or conflict possible, to analyze the world of scarcity and the nature of property rights. See ibid.; also Kinsella, “On Libertarian Legal Theory, Self-Ownership and Drug Laws,” text at notes 16–17. And of course Mises and Rothbard employed the construct of the “evenly rotating economy,” or ERE, for economic analysis, even though human action is virtually inconceivable in such conditions. See the criticism of the ERE in Jörg Guido Hülsmann, “A Realist Approach to Equilibrium Analysis,” *Q.J. Austrian Econ.* 3, no. 4 (Winter 2000; https://mises.org/library/realist-approach-equilibrium-analysis): 3–51. On the Schlaraffenland construct, see Hoppe, “Of Common, Public, and Private Property and the Rationale for Total Privatization,” in *The Great Fiction: Property, Economy, Society, and the Politics of Decline*, Second Expanded Edition (Auburn, Ala.: Mises Institute, 2021; www.hanshoppe.com/tgf), p. 86; idem, *A Theory of Socialism and Capitalism: Economics, Politics, and Ethics* (Auburn, Ala.: Mises Institute, 2010 [1989]; www.hanshoppe.com/tsc), p. 219. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Hans-Hermann Hoppe, “On the Corona Panic and Other Insanities: Interview by Andrea Venanzoni,” *LewRockwell.com* (Aug. 4, 2021); idem, “State or Private Law Society on Dealing With Corona,” *LewRockwell.com* (Jan. 4, 2021), both available at www.hanshoppe.com/publications. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. See Hans-Hermann Hoppe, “Libertarianism and the Alt-Right: In Search of   
   a Libertarian Strategy for Social Change,” *Mises UK* (Oct. 20 2017), mentioning the “Liberallala-Libertarians.” [↑](#footnote-ref-9)