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An Austrian Perspective on Hans-Hermann Hoppe and the Property and Freedom Society

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Rahim Taghizadegan is the last Austrian economist of the Austrian School in the direct tradition, having taught at universities in Austria, Liechtenstein, Switzerland, and Germany. Author of over fifteen books, he is the founder of the private university *scholarium*, where the Austrian School can be studied in its original interdisciplinary form. He is also a physicist (specialization in nuclear physics and complex systems), entrepreneur, and investor. Originally from Iran, he has grown up in Austria and studied in Switzerland and the US.

**A Slender Thread**

I grew up in Austria, where one might expect the Austrian School of Economics to be a natural part of my education, especially since I studied economics at university. However, the tradition had been entirely disrupted in Austria. It was only upon going to the United States as a young physicist that I discovered the Austrian School was far more than a mere footnote in history books on economics; it was a vibrant tradition with significant relevance to our times.

The survival of the Austrian School owes much to a slender thread of scholars, connected across generations. Ludwig von Mises, a towering figure of the Austrian School, migrated to the United States like many others but never secured a professorship. Despite this potential barrier to academic recognition, a select group became his students. A smaller number still devoted their lives to preserving this tradition. Among them, Murray N. Rothbard stood out, whom, regrettably, I missed by a few years. Fortunately, Rothbard’s dedication found a successor in Hans-Hermann Hoppe, who distinguished himself through his commitment to keeping the tradition alive with the necessary passion and intellect, despite considerable challenges.

I am privileged to regard Hans-Hermann Hoppe as a teacher and one of the vital links enabling the Austrian School of Economics’ unlikely endurance. This persistence occurred against all odds, despite the original Austrian School being at odds with what Rothbard regarded as the worst century yet, and it continues to be at odds with the interests of pseudo-elites and academics around the world.

I could not believe my luck when I learned that this eminent figure of the modern Austrian School was not only a native German speaker like myself but also had close personal ties to Austria, and was moving back permanently to Europe from the US. Hans thus symbolizes the Austrian School’s final return to its roots. My other teacher and mentor, Hayek’s student Roland Baader, an entrepreneur and equally passionate publicist, was also of German decent and a good friend and admirer of Hans. Regrettably, he passed away in 2012 and had been unable to travel for many years prior.

Fortunately, Hans has preserved not only his intellectual vigor but also his physical health into old age. As a result, he has been able to frequently visit the birthplace of our shared tradition in person over the past decades. I have had the privilege of organizing splendid events in some of Vienna’s most beautiful historic buildings, often associated with the Austrian School, with Hans as the guest of honor.

With the Austrian School, nearly all other vestiges of old Europe’s vibrant high culture succumbed to the totalitarian regimes of the last century. Modern Austria largely resembles a museum, where envy plays a significant role in the national identity. Beyond the urban center, which disseminates fiat money and fiat ideas, at least some elements of Alpine culture and beauty have managed to endure.

**A Salon in a Garden**

An exception was the last Viennese “liberal” Salon, in the traditional European sense of classical liberalism and openness to all arguments, even those deemed politically incorrect. Until his passing in 2011, my friend Rainer Ernst Schütz hosted this Salon in a penthouse apartment within the building he owned, located right beside the Danube canal. He and his wife Elisabeth managed to visit Bodrum a few times before his untimely death, witnessing how, in an unexpected place and under unlikely circumstances, the old European Salon culture experienced a new and surprising revival.

The setting, a garden exquisitely designed by Gülçin Imre Hoppe, Hans’s wife and companion, creates a historical connection of even greater depth. Situated in one of the ancient cultural centers of the Mediterranean, it evokes the original concept of “academia.” This term originates from the garden named after the Attic hero Academos, which Plato established as an intimate space for profound argumentation.

In old Vienna, such intimacy was discovered in private living spaces like Rainer’s, hence the term “salon.” Privacy is essential for meaningful discourse, making the salon—whether in Vienna or Bodrum—the antithesis of today’s “academia.” Where the focus is on public appeal, or even worse, “public money,” intellects are as defaced and disregarded as public restrooms. Especially in an era where public pressure against “thoughtcrimes” intensifies, privacy becomes the thinker’s sanctuary.

Hans has praxeologically demonstrated that private property emerges as a result of argumentation. Through his role as a host, he has practically demonstrated how, conversely, argumentation emerges from private property because it fosters the privacy essential for a salon. Access by invitation ensures accountability—a concept often shunned by politicians and “academics.” This mechanism of quality control, occasionally leading to consequences for misconduct, has preserved the caliber of participants necessary for meaningful discourse. Even more crucial to genuine argumentation is the intimacy that enables complete freedom of speech without animosity. The Property and Freedom Society embodies the closeness of a family gathering, creating an atmosphere of intellectual camaraderie that frees both mind and speech, devoid of the pettiness and malice typical of “public debate.”

**A Counter-academia**

The concept of “public debate,” intertwined with the detrimental notion of the media acting as a “fourth power” within the state apparatus, has acted as a force of decivilization. The atmosphere, aesthetics, culture, and—most critically—the quality of thought and debate within the Property and Freedom Society serve as a stark contrast.

The Austrian School is often categorized as an academic tradition, yet this characterization overlooks a crucial aspect of its heritage. Carl Menger, the school’s founder, advised his favorite students against pursuing academic careers, highlighting a different path for the tradition. The zenith of the Austrian School is not located within the lecture halls of the University of Vienna, but rather in the private salon of Ludwig von Mises—his “Kreis” (circle). This circle usually gathered in a room at the chamber of commerce, Mises’s workplace, then moved to a restaurant specializing in Mediterranean cuisine, and finally concluded in a coffee house. The chamber of commerce’s wall paintings, the restaurant’s name (Ancora Verde), and the coffee all echoed the ancient seafaring tradition of trade. With Austria landlocked in the modern era, Bodrum, the ancient Halicarnassus, indeed offers a more fitting backdrop for a Hoppe Kreis, continuing this grand tradition.

A fundamental distinction from modern academia lies in the interdisciplinary nature of the old Austrian School and its circles. Contrary to expectations that a “conference” on the Austrian School of Economics  
might be a tedious dissection of minor points within a specialized interest of the economics field, a session of the Property and Freedom Society is anything but. While Hans might not align with Friedrich A. von Hayek on numerous issues, he embodies Hayek’s adage that one who is only an economist cannot be a good economist.

As a distinguished philosopher, Hans exhibits a fervent interest in a range of disciplines including history, ethics, law, politics, and psychology, mirroring Rothbard’s comprehensive approach. The Property and Freedom Society, a cosmopolitan event held in a location deeply intertwined with world history and geopolitics, consistently astonishes with the high level of historical expertise and curiosity it attracts. History, being among the most manipulated disciplines due to its role in controlling narratives, makes the importance of critical and even contrarian perspectives all the more significant.

Over the decades, Hans has expanded his intellectual contributions across various fields, sharing significant advancements in legal philosophy, epistemology, history, and political theory primarily within the intimate yet rigorously critical environment of the Property and Freedom Society. Total agreement is never expected; discussions often extend into the warm nights of Bodrum, occasionally veering into unexpected directions, aided by the surprisingly fine red wine served by the ever-attentive staff.

The distinction between modern academia and the older tradition of critical thought isn’t just the deep specialization into single disciplines to legitimize “experts.” More fundamentally, it is the specialization in theory—in its very modern sense. Originally, theory meant critical reflection on reality. Nowadays, theory often revolves around models and constructs, frequently distancing itself from reality.

Ludwig von Mises introduced the term praxeology to describe a proper theory that captures the real actions of real human beings, in contrast to modern economics, which often focuses on the unrealistic and the abstract. On one hand, this trend is part of a “science” cargo cult that serves very tangible, worldly interests. On the other, theory, as opposed to practical application, rationalizes endeavors of little voluntary financial value—providing a perfect haven for state-financed intellectuals.

**A Place of Practice**

Both the Mises Kreis and the Property and Freedom Society stand in stark contrast to the tendencies observed in modern academia. These gatherings have successfully drawn the most practical and straightforward individuals, not to the exclusion of the intellectually inclined, but as a vital counterbalance and grounding in reality. A significant accomplishment of Hans’s salon is undoubtedly its ability to attract and select some of the most fascinating individuals of our era, who are more reminiscent of the Renaissance than of today’s compartmentalized and dependent ways of life: entrepreneurs, engineers, doctors, programmers, inventors, warriors. The breadth of conversations reflects the diverse and distinguished nature of the participants, as one might expect from such a unique assembly.

It comes as no surprise that many innovations have been discussed at the Property and Freedom Society earlier than elsewhere. A notable instance is Bitcoin. Hans has had strong reasons for his skepticism, stemming from his too early exposure to Bitcoin, back when it was probably primarily embraced by individuals whom he would not consider trustworthy or suitable for invitation to the Property and Freedom Society. Nevertheless, he has permitted discussions and even a minor, off-schedule presentation on the subject. As a result, many participants first learned about Bitcoin at the Property and Freedom Society, and for some, this knowledge has led to significant financial benefits. Intriguingly, Bitcoin has now become one of the main avenues drawing interest to the Austrian School and Hans’s teachings.

The absence of political correctness or imposed quotas at the Property and Freedom Society has indeed led to a predominance of male speakers, who often display a greater willingness to risk appearing foolish on a stage where the audience’s average IQ is notably high. However, it is important to recognize that, much like Mises in contrast to Hayek, Hans has consistently welcomed women to this distinguished society. Over the years, several women have been among the most insightful and learned participants. Notably, the actual host of the gathering stands out. The more practical aspects of the Property and Freedom Society, echoing the tradition of the old Viennese salons, have largely been in the hand of a woman: Gülçin Imre Hoppe, Hans’s wife, is not only an entrepreneur and the owner of the venue but also a passionate gardener and an intellectual whose expertise and interests span the Austrian School and extend well beyond it. Her contributions merge the finest aspects of Eastern and Western traditions, playing a crucial role in creating this unique interdisciplinary and intercultural oasis.

What Mises would have predicted, is true at least within the confines of this unique space: grounded in sound principles and ideas, there is no necessity for conflict among sexes, cultures, races, or identities. This vision also aligns with Roland Baader’s beliefs: whereas politics divides us, he observed, the economy—the peaceful exchange of goods and ideas—unites us.

Catallactics, a term Mises introduced for the praxeology of voluntary exchange relationships, encapsulates this concept. The term’s Greek roots suggest not just trade but the transformation of enemies into friends. In this light, the Property and Freedom Society represents another success story: it has fostered countless friendships, witnessed marriages, and seen families grow. It is these connections that have made me miss only two gatherings in two decades, with some members demonstrating even greater diligence.

**Literature**

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