

1922: A Watershed Year for Mises and Hayek

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Shigeki TOMO, Ph. D.
Professor of economics
Kyoto-Sangyo University in Japan
tomo@cc.kyoto-su.ac.jp

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Introduction

This paper contributes to show the doctrinal dehomogenization of Hayek and Mises², which can be traced in the early 1920s. Surely Mises is well known as an initiator of the economic calculation debate and Hayek as an editor of that book which collected papers in this matter³. Both shared a negative answer towards the possibility of the socialist system. But they did not have common ideas as to the relation between individuals and the social order. This had already become prominent in their opposite attitudes towards universalism asserted by Othmar Spann [1878 10/1 - 1950 7/8], one of full professors for economics and sociology at Viennese University since May 1919. The result of this paper may allow us to answer the question about the origination of their later fundamental difference: while Mises could establish a system of Human Action, Hayek could not.

Spann's Universalism⁴

Spann's universalism has at least two distinctive aspects. The one is well known as notorious foundation for the Austrofascism, especially for the *Heimwehr* during the interwar period of Austria. This explains his invitation by the Nazis to the Institute for the *Ständewesen* in 1934⁵. This ideological nature was unfortunately so strong that there could have been no incentive to make any scientific researches on the other aspect of Spann's universalism: a clue for criticizing individualist economic doctrines.

It was in a 1910 review article by Spann on Schumpeter's *Das Wesen* (1908) that Spann had presented the term *Universalismus* for the first time. In criticizing Schumpeter's contraposition of methodological individualism and political one, Spann underlined far more important distinction of individualism and universalism in social philosophies. He wrote:

The theoretical perception of socio-philosophical individualism contraposes to that of socio-philosophical universalism. According to the latter, the whole has primacy to the part, namely the community (society) has primacy to the individual.⁶

Here Spann explains universalism as the primacy relationship between whole and part. Surely, as he himself asserts⁷, the Aristotelian viewpoint of whole-part contraposition had been already presented in his earliest book (1905) on empirical studies of illegitimate children in Frankfurt. To give an explanation of his sociological framework in the first chapter of this work, especially to answer the question what the social is, Spann wrote:

If we could conceptualize the society as a whole composed of parts, it is possible to consider human behaviours as fundamental facts of society in two ways: to see them as individual

² This topic had been discussed on several occasions. For example, see Salerno (1993).

³ Hayek ed. (1935)

⁴ This word is a translation of the German "Univesalismus" used by Spann. "Organistic-holism" may be a better translation delivering its connotation: "Spann offered an organicistic-holistic theory of society that agreed with Catholic moral theology; it left no room for individual actors and their volitional conduct." (Wagner (1983) p. 12) And Schumpeter summed up it as follows: Universalism as opposed to Individualism means that 'social collectives,' such as society, nation, church, and the like, are conceptually prior to their individual members; that the former are the really relevant entities with which the social sciences have to deal; that the latter are but the products of the former; hence that analysis must work from the collectives and not from individual behavior. (Schumpeter, Joseph Alois (1954) p. 85.)

⁵ But we have to notice that Spann was arrested by the Nazis in its annexion of Austria in 1938 because of the Christianity of Spann's idea.

⁶ Spann (1910-1967) S. 325: "Der theoretischen Anschauung des sozialphilosophischen Individualismus steht die des sozialphilosophischen Universalismus (Kollektivismus) entgegen, wonach das Ganze gegenüber dem Teil, das heißt die Gemeinschaft (Gesellschaft) gegenüber dem Individuum den Primat hat."

⁷ Eden and Cedar Paul tr. (1930) p. 284

phenomena themselves; and to see them as parts for the whole, that is to say, as if they were motors putting the machine in action, or to see them as phenomena functioning services for the formation and life of the whole organization⁸.

But we cannot find Spann's usage of the term "universalism" not only here in this chapter, but also in his habilitation treatise on economy and society (1907).

And Spann explained the contents of universalism more fully in the first edition of his *Haupttheorien der Volkswirtschaftslehre* in 1911⁹. This work had been originally prepared for introductory education of economics to fresh students of technical university in Bruno, where he was established as a full professor in that year. The contents of this book are, nevertheless, not principles of economics, but the history of economics, as its translated title shows¹⁰. What's more, they are not an ordinary textbook of that field, but are strongly oriented according to author's viewpoint based on the contraposition of universalism and individualism. Its explanation appears at Section 2 "Introduction to the problems of Social Philosophy" of Cp 2 "Natural Law and Physiocracy" up to the 8th edition¹¹. One of Spann's main intentions is to assert that in German economic thinking there existed universalist ideas represented by Adam Müller, Fichte and so on, and that their advantages must be taken into account, compared with individualistic economics including the English classical as well as the marginal utility school¹². It is in the same chapter, entitled "Further development of individualist economics", of the first and second editions that Spann deals with Smith, Ricardo and Carl Menger at the same time as follows:

"Today's economics is no longer based on the classical theory of value, which was represented by Smith and Ricardo and refined by Marx. The way of Carl Menger (*Grundsätze der Volkswirtschaftslehre*, 1871) became dominant in this field. His theory of value, so called the theory of marginal utility and that of goods based on it, has met with approval from almost all the economic scholars."¹³

Apart from their theories of value and methods of analysis, according to Spann, these economists must be put under the same category of economists constructing theories based on the self-interest hypothesis that an individual behaves to maximize her/his utility or profit regardless of the others.

In contrast to the mainstream view, there had been another line of economic philosophers, Adam Müller, Fichte, Schelling. Spann calls their view "universalist", because they ascribe primacy to the universe or the whole rather than its parts in discussing economic phenomena.

The second step of Spann's universalism began with his *Fundament der Volkswirtschaftslehre*¹⁴. In this book he tried to reconstruct economics based on his universalist idea. This book provided Mises and Hayek with a key point, which divides both with respect to the starting point of economics.

Mises against universalism

In 1922 Mises published his second book entitled *Gemeinwirtschaft* for criticizing socialist ideas. This followed his famous assertion of impossibility of central planned socialist economy, which had already presented in his 1920 paper. Those publications reflect the historical event at that time: it was a hot issue to discuss after the establishment of Socialist state a new and actual question

⁸ Spann (1904) Ch. 1.

⁹ One copy exists in the library of Sombart at Osaka City University in Japan.

¹⁰ Eden and Cedar Paul tr. (1930). This had been already published under the title *Types of Economic Theory* in England in the same year.

¹¹ In the 9th edition (1922) that section became a new independent chapter 3.

¹² That's why Spann called the doctrines of Menger and Cassel *die neue klassische Lehre*, which is translated by Eden & Cedar as *neo-classical school*. p. 252.

¹³ Spann (1911) p. 74, (1916) p. 89.

¹⁴ The first edition is Spann (1918), and the second Spann (1921).

whether that system can be viable, or whether the Austro-German republic should adapt that system or not. This book was so celebrated that the second edition could be requested ten years later and its English translation could appear in 1935. In spite of this success, one of most important parts in the texts of German editions reminds unnoticed due to not being translated into English. It is just because Mises intentionally omitted that part.

In the first and second German editions of his *Gemeinwirtschaft* Mises criticize Spann's recognition that there can be many ultimate ends (*Endzwecke*) for an individual like the truth in logic, the good in ethics, and the saint in religion & so on¹⁵. The main reason of Mises's criticism is as follows: If there are several ends in the same level for an individual, her/his action must remain indeterminate. Mises clearly here came to recognition that economics should deal with human action with its definite end. But in publishing the English translation of that book, Mises omitted these criticism and recognition. This omission was intentional: the translator explains that she followed the author's request¹⁶. In the place of the omission another older paper on economic calculation was inserted¹⁷.

Mises's intentional omission does not mean that Mises withdrew his criticism of Spann's universalism. In fact, he restated it once again in the first essay of his *Grundlage* in 1933. A main point in his arguments against universalism there is that it is unable to grasp the whole or totalities scientifically, though one can surely experience it. It is because "reason and science deal only with isolated fragments detached from the living whole and thereby killed. They never refer to life as it is lived and never to life as a whole."¹⁸. As long as one can neither scientifically nor definitely conceive totalities, it is not appropriate to put any propositions related to totalities as the starting axiom of human action.

"If catallactics were to begin, as Spann wants it to do, with totalities and imaginary constructions, its point of departure would be arbitrarily chosen. For totalities and imaginary constructions are not unequivocally precise, recognizable, and confirmable in such a way that agreement could be reached about their existence or nonexistence. Totalities and imaginary constructions are seen very differently by Spann from the way they are viewed by the Marxists, and Coudenhove-Kalergi certainly does not look upon them in the same light as Friedrich Naumann did."¹⁹

The omission indicates, rather, that Mises thought that it is at least of no importance that any human action has its definite end, and that economics as an aprioristic science should regard the end of an acting man as given. Surely following the tradition of modern economics, he did not forget to characterize the ends of human action generally as "the removal of a dissatisfaction"²⁰ or "the relief from a felt uneasiness"²¹. But he did not see that an individual has many ends at some point of time and that they construct an ordering or have their priority, nor did he try to discuss how the end of some action has been selected prior to the others. Of course, the last point seems to be out of range of modern economics. But this marks the breakpoint of methodological individualism, because the process of an individual ordering ends must be influenced by the rules and orders of the society and organization, to which the individual belongs. To grasp totalities and imaginary constructions is one thing and to analyze the influential process of properties of totalities upon their parts is another. In

¹⁵ Spann (1918) p. 21, (1921).

¹⁶ See Translator's Note (see <http://www.econlib.org/library/Mises/msSContents.html>)

¹⁷ Kahane, J. tr. (1936) p.111 ff

¹⁸ Reisman, George tr. (1960) p. 44

¹⁹ Reisman, George tr. (1960) p. 211

²⁰ Reisman, George tr. (1960) p. 31

²¹ Mises, Ludwig Edler von (1996) p. 92

this regards Mises gave it up to step further, although it must be clear that the theory of human action must explain its process how the living whole influences and regulates actions of its fragments.

Hayek for universalism

In 1922 Hayek started to prepare his dissertation for political science (*Staatswissenschaften*) and submitted it in February of the next year under the supervision of Othmar Spann and Hans Kelsen. Hayek's dissertation consists of more than 2 parts. Only the draft of the first part over 100 pages is now preserved at the Hoover Institute of Stanford University (HIA, 104). It was a preliminary version, because there are many annotations in handwriting. The main contents are divided into 27 sections. The last section is mistakenly numbered 26.

The main assertion of this paper is as follows: At the beginning of his first theoretical studies in economics, Hayek was not a methodological individualist at least in two senses. First Hayek recognized a discrepancy between the theories of price determination and distribution, which is indicated on the basis of Spann's universalist ideas contraposed to methodological individualism; second Hayek further elaborated the means-ends framework, which had been presented by Spann as a methodological substitute for individualist economics.

The selection of the theme of dissertation by Hayek reflected Spann's view on the imputation theory, although Hayek later²² mentioned Friedrich Wieser only. Two of the most remarkable new additions in the later editions of Spann's *Haupttheorien* are the Böhm-Bawerkian horse-trading model as the theory of price determination represented by the marginal utility school and the problem of imputation as the theory of distribution by that school. The former appeared first in the 6th edition of *Haupttheorien* (1920) and the latter in the 9th (1922). It is quite interesting to know that they belong to the period after Spann's appointment to a full professor of the University of Vienna in 1919. This may show that Spann as the successor of Eugen Phillipovich²³ must have presented his attitude towards Austrian-school economics, therefore started to do a full-blown critical study on it. In fact, Spann selected as the theme for his inaugural address held on 5 May 1919 an exposition of his universalist viewpoint contraposed to individualism²⁴.

Spann concludes that there exists a discrepancy in theories of price and distribution by the marginal utility school. The results were presented for the first time in the second edition of his *Fundament der Volkswirtschaftslehre*²⁵. In the newly inserted section²⁶ Spann pointed out:

Imputation appears from the outset as a result of one organic phenomena connecting economic quantities, or as an expression for an organism of values, which means no atomistic causal relationships found on an isolated market. Therefore, from the universalist (economic qualitative) understanding of economy, the problem of prices can be solved only if it can be solved as that of macroeconomic imputation. But so far in the theory of marginal utility, there left a discrepancy between the price and imputation theories. No connection has been established between them: while the price resulted from an atomistic market, the process of imputation independently started from the organic connection of constitutive factors. Both

²² "In economics it was my teacher Friedrich von Wieser who directed my interest to the intricacies of the subjective theory of value, on one particular problem of which, the theory of 'imputation', I wrote during the following year and a half a doctoral dissertation while employed in a temporary government office." (McCloughry, Roy ed. (1984) p. 1)

²³ Hayek's explanation "Othmar Spann was appointed as Wieser's successor in Vienna" (CWH 4, 173) is incorrect and the editor is right in commenting "Wieser's chair went to Hans Mayer" (Op. cit).

²⁴ Spann (1919)

²⁵ Spann (1921)

²⁶ "*Leistungsgröße der Gebilde der höher Ordnung oder der Preis*" This means the section is dealing with the price of goods of higher order.

theories remained unmediated each other.²⁷

This perspective may guide Hayek in determining the theme of his dissertation.

Furthermore, in Section 7 of his dissertation, entitled, "The economic task, the simplest principle for its solution, the rule of realizing ends according to their order, and the effectual scope of the rule"²⁸, Hayek deals with problems posed by Spann, which Mises neglected: they are arising from the plurality of ends, which available means can meet. They are simply suggested by the definition of economy by Spann: economy is a total sum of means for ends²⁹. Regarding the definition as suitable *treffend*³⁰, Hayek shared this judgement with Mises³¹, but went further beyond Mises. Especially Hayek underlined that without seeing the whole of those ends, which available means can meet; one cannot determine the desirability of an end. This judgement is in lines with his agreement with Spann's universalist point of view. It can be traced in the following explanation where the term "universalism" appears in footnote (3):

As long as one isolatedly proceeds to conduct his research on the phenomena of value and price as the primary objective, instead of pursuing the laws of economy as such that can be only understood as whole(3) and of explaining the phenomena of value and price on that basis...such a research would be necessarily in vain.³²

Here Hayek clearly recognizes that Spann's criticism based on universalism is right. It is only one place in Hayek's all works where he supports for universalism. Generally speaking, doctoral students are always obliged to be obedient to their supervisor. But the main purpose of Hayek's dissertation is not to present his mere obedience to all the doctrines by Spann, but to improve them. In fact, Hayek wrote: "The works by Spann and Mayer surely opened the new way for investigation, but their concepts are not enough for its completion..."³³ Then he started to make a modification of Hans Mayer's concept of the restraint of ends by means as a premis of various problems of economy. Hayek added his new concept of the restraint of means by ends. And he applied these concepts for establishing the problem of general economy: "how to rank the ordering structure of many ends in the meands-ends relationship."³⁴ Since the problem of imputation belongs to that of general economy, it must be solved by the way of solution of this general problem. Unfortunately we cannot know concretely how Hayek applied his general ideas presented in Part I

²⁷ Spann (1921) p. 143: Da Zurechnung von vomeherein als Ergebnis eines organischen Zusammenhanges von Leistungsgrößen erscheint, als Ausdruck eines Organismus der Werte (nicht eines sinnlosen, atomistischen Kausalprozesses auf einem atomistischen Markte), ist im Sinne der leistungsartigen und universalistischen Auffassung der Wirtschaft das Preisproblem erst dann gelöst, wenn es als volkswirtschaftliche Zurechnung gelöst werden kann. Bisher aber klaffte ein Riß in der Grenznutzenlehre zwischen Preistheorie und Zurechnungslehre, da beide ohne Zusammenhang waren. Der Preis war atomistisches Marktergebnis; die Zurechnung allein ging vom organischen Zusammenhang der Komponenten aus. Beide Lehren standen unvermittelt nebeneinander

²⁸ Hayek (1923) p. 14

²⁹ Spann (1921) p. 20: *Wirtschaft ist ein Inbegriff von Mitteln für Ziele.*

³⁰ *ibid.*

³¹ Mises (1922) p. 96, (1932) p. 88: "undoubtedly right (*unzweifelhaft richtig*)"

³² Hayek (1923) p. 3: "Solange man nämlich die Erscheinungen von Wert und Preis als primäre Gegenstände der Untersuchung isoliert in Angriff nahm anstatt zuerst die Gesetze der Wirtschaft als solche, die natürlich nur als Ganzes erfassbar ist3), zu erforschen und auf dieser Grundlage die Erscheinungen von Wert und Preis zu erklären, solange man nach ihrem Bestimmungsgrunde wie nach einer Substanz, die in den Gütern erhalten sein müsse, suchte, waren diese Untersuchungen notwendig erfolglos." In footnote 3: "Über die "Einheit der Wirtschaft", über die "Interdependenz" ihrer Erscheinungen bei Schumpeter, ihren "Universalismus" bei H. Oswald <sic> (Vortäge über wirtschaftlich Grundbegriffe" Jena 1906 und später)."

³³ Hayek diss. p. 10

³⁴ Hayek diss. p. 14

of his dissertation, because its Part II had been lost and is not preserved in the Hayek Papers.

In preparation of his dissertation on imputation, anyway, Hayek was clearly inspired by Spann. Nevertheless he deleted any indications of this fact in his published paper on imputation. It may reflect the fact that Hayek was purged from the Spann circle in the middle of 1920.

Concluding remarks

One of forks dividing Mises and Hayek in the year 1922 can be detected in their attitudes towards Spann's universalism, which can be interpreted as an assertion that all the social macroeconomic phenomena can only be explained under the hypothesis that an acting individual must at first determine the ordering of her/his several attainable ends under a given quantity of means inevitably with reference to her/his external contexts: the family, the others, the orders or rules of society, to which she/he belongs. Whereas Mises as an honest methodological individualist might see even this external reference as one of those contents, which cause optimizing human behaviors, and came to provide the leading Austrian treatise "indifferent to the ultimate goals of action"³⁵, Hayek, following his supervisor, concerned the repercussion between many ordering processes of individuals and the rules of their society, and as a result reached the philosophy of spontaneous order.

The old attitudes of Mises and Hayek towards Spann can be traced in their later works: while Mises's critique of Spann is scattered in his recollection³⁶, it is hardly to find any critical words on Spann's universalism in later works by Hayek. Of course, Hayek depreciates Spann as Economist, but he respects the supervisor as follows: Hayek learned some useful tools of means-ends structure in economics from Spann's *Fundament*³⁷.

³⁵ Mises (1996) p. 15.

³⁶ Mises, Margit von eds. (1978), (1981).

³⁷ Kresge and Wenar ed. (1994) p. 54

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