

# Austrian Economics Newsletter

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## The "True" Money Supply: A Measure of the Supply of the Medium of Exchange in the U.S. Economy

by

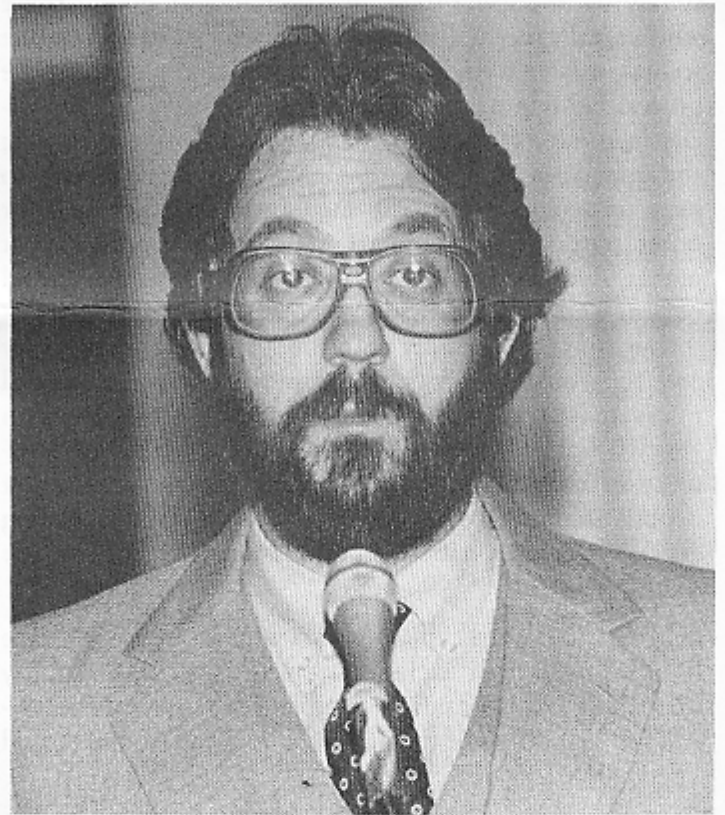
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The "True" Money Supply (TMS), developed by Professor Murray Rothbard and myself,<sup>1</sup> is an admittedly imperfect attempt to provide a statistical measure of money that is consistent with the theoretical definition of money as the general medium of exchange in society.<sup>2</sup>

Measures of the U.S. money stock in current use in economic and business forecasting and in applied economics and historical research are flawed precisely because they are not based on an explicit and coherent theoretical conception of the essential nature of money. Given the all-pervasive role of money in the modern market economy, existing money-supply measures therefore tend to impede, rather than to facilitate, a clear understanding of the past or future development of actual economic events. Each one of the familiar set of M's calculated by the Federal Reserve System, for example, both excludes some items that are identifiable as money by our definition and includes other items that lack the essential properties of a general medium of exchange.

As the general medium of exchange, money is a good universally and routinely accepted in exchange by market participants; or, put another way, it is the one good that is traded for all other goods on the market. One important implication of this fact—and an important empirical test of whether or not a thing can be counted as money—is that money serves as the *final means of payment in all transactions*. For instance, credit cards are not counted as part of the TMS, because use of a credit card in the purchase of a good does not finally discharge the debt created in the current transaction. Instead, it gives rise to a second credit transaction that involves present and future monetary payments. Thus the issuer of the card or lender is now bound to pay the seller of the good immediately with money on behalf of the card-holder or borrower. The latter, in turn, is obliged to make a monetary repayment of the loan to the issuer at the end of the month or at a later date, at which time the transaction is finally completed.<sup>3</sup>



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In the case of a paper fiat money, such as the current U.S. dollar, there is a second test that can be applied to determine whether a particular item should be counted in money supply statistics. Unlike any good produced in the market, including a commodity money, whose quantities are ultimately determined by the interaction of supply and demand,<sup>4</sup> the quantity of government fiat money (but not its purchasing power) at any point in time is determined solely by decisions of suppliers of the good, i.e. government central banks, without respect to the desires and actions of the demanders. The fact that money is routinely accepted

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as the final means of payment by all participants in the market means that fiat money can be literally lent and spent into existence regardless of the public's existing demand for it. For example, if an additional quantity of Fed notes is printed up and spent by government on various goods and services, an excess supply of money will temporarily be created in the economy. The initial recipients of the new money will quickly get rid of the excess cash simply by increasing their own spending on goods; those who eagerly receive the new money as payments in the second or later rounds of spending will do likewise, in the process bidding up the prices of goods, reducing the purchasing power of the dollar, and, consequently, increasing the quantities of dollars that each individual desires to keep on hand to meet expected future payments or for other purposes. In summary, any excess supply of fiat money does not go out of existence, but is spent and respent and continually passed on like a "hot potato" throughout the economy until the surplus money is finally and fully absorbed by the resulting increase in general prices and in desired dollar holdings.<sup>5</sup> It is this criterion which is applied below in resolving the apparent inconsistency of including demand deposits and money market deposit accounts (MMDAs) in the TMS, while excluding checkable money market mutual fund ( MMMF ) equity shares.

In what follows, I explain briefly why various items have been included in or excluded from the TMS. To simplify the exposition, I organize my explanation around the several Fed definitions of the money supply and of total liquid assets.

### **Components of M1**

Currency in the hands of the nonbank public, i.e., excluding currency held by the U.S. Treasury, the Fed, and in the vaults of commercial banks, is counted in the TMS, precisely because it is the physical embodiment of the generally accepted medium of exchange in the U.S. economy. Federal Reserve notes of various dollar denominations (as well as token coins and paper notes issued by the U.S. Treasury) are the "standard money" or ultimate "cash" of the U.S. monetary system, having replaced gold in this function, at least for American citizens, in 1933.

Demand deposits or checking account balances at commercial banks and other checkable deposits, such as NOW accounts held at S&Ls, are included in the TMS by virtue of the fact that they are claims to the standard money redeemable at par on demand by the depositor or by a third party designated by the depositor. Despite the fact that these deposits are only fractionally backed by cash or immediately cashable reserve deposits at the Fed, their instantaneous redemption at par value is effectively guaranteed by two factors. First there is federal deposit insurance, which legally insures up to \$100,000 of each and

every depositor at a given bank or thrift against loss, but which, in practice, has almost always guaranteed the full worth of all deposits, usually by subsidizing the merger of an ailing institution with a healthy one.<sup>6</sup> Second and more importantly, there is the Fed itself, which, in its much publicized function as the "lender of last resort," always stands ready to head off a banking panic by simply printing up and lending the needed quantities of Fed notes to banks or thrifts unable to meet their demand liabilities.<sup>7</sup> For these reasons, checkable deposits held at federally-insured banks and thrifts are readily acceptable in exchange as perfect substitutes, dollar for dollar, for Federal Reserve notes.<sup>8</sup>

In contrast, travelers' checks issued by nonbank financial institutions, such as American Express, are excluded from the TMS because they neither are riskfree claims to immediate cash nor serve as final means of payment in transactions. What a travelers' check represents from an economic point of view is a credit claim on the investment portfolio of the issuing company. The purchase of travelers' checks from American Express involves, in effect, a "call" loan by the purchaser to American Express, which the latter pledges to repay to the purchaser or to a designated third party at an unspecified date in the future. In the meantime, most of the proceeds of such loans are invested by American Express on its own account in interest bearing assets, while a fraction is held in the form of demand deposits to meet anticipated payments of its travelers' check liabilities as they "mature." In exchange for the foregone interest (and a small fee) the purchaser receives access to an alternative payments system which avoids the risk of loss associated with carrying cash payments and the potential delay or nonacceptance involved with payment by personal check drawn on a distant bank. But the travelers' checks themselves are not the final means of payment in a transaction;<sup>9</sup> the sellers who receive travelers' checks in exchange quickly and routinely present them for final payment at a bank and obtain either cash or a credit to their demand deposit accounts, with the sums paid out ultimately being debited to the demand deposit account of American Express. Moreover, in the highly unlikely event that financial reverses force the issuing company into institutional liquidation, the holders of its outstanding stock of travelers' checks would be, economically and legally, in the same boat as debtholders of any insolvent business firm, having no political guarantee of a dollar-for-dollar payoff of their debt claims, such as that provided by federal deposit insurance and privileged access to the lender of last resort.

### **Components of M2 Not Included in M1**

Savings deposits, whether at commercial banks or thrift institutions, are economically indistinguishable from demand deposits and are therefore included in the TMS. Both demand and savings deposits are federally insured under the same conditions and, consequently, both repre-

sent instantly cashable, par value claims to the general medium of exchange. The objection that claims on dollars held in savings deposits typically do not circulate in exchange<sup>10</sup> (although certified or cashier's checks may be readily drawn against such deposits and are certainly generally acceptable in exchange), while not unimportant for some purposes of analysis, is here beside the point. The essential, economic point is that some or all of the dollars accumulated in, e.g., passbook savings accounts are effectively withdrawable on demand by depositors in the form of spendable cash.<sup>11</sup> In addition, savings deposits are at all times transferrable,<sup>12</sup> dollar for dollar, into "transactions" accounts such as demand deposits or NOW accounts.<sup>13</sup>

The common-sense case for the inclusion of savings deposits in the stock of general media of exchange was cogently presented by the eminent German banker and economist, Melchior Palyi:

In their own minds, *money is what people consider as purchasing power*, available at once or shortly. People's "Liquidity" status and financial disposition are not affected by juristic subtleties and technicalities. One kind of deposit is as good as another, provided it is promptly redeemable into legal tender at virtual face value and is accepted in settling debts. The volume of total demand for goods and services is not affected by the distribution of purchasing power among the diverse reservoirs into which that purchasing power is placed. As long as free transferability obtains from one reservoir to the other, the deposits cannot differ in function or value . . .

A source of confusion is the identification of savings deposits with savings. The former are no more and no less 'saved' than are the funds put on a checking account or the currency held in stockings. In all three cases, someone is refraining from consumption (for the time being); in all three, the funds constitute actual purchasing power. And it makes no difference in this context how the purchasing power is generated originally: dug out of a gold mine, 'printed' by a government agency, or 'created' by a bank loan. As a matter of fact, savings banks and associations do exactly what commercial banks do: they build a credit structure on fractional reserves.<sup>14</sup>

Overnight repurchase agreements or "RPs" were devised in the mid-1970s as a means of evading the legal prohibition against the payment of interest on demand deposits. They are, in essence, interest bearing demand deposits held by business firms at commercial banks and therefore are included in the TMS. In a repurchase agreement, a firm, in effect, makes a loan to a bank which is collateralized by government securities. The bank "sells" government securities to the firm with an agreement to "repurchase" them the following day at a slightly higher price, i.e., to

repay the loan plus interest. When the purchase or loan is initially made, the bank debits the firm's demand deposit balance and credits its RP account by the amount of the loan. On the following day, the bank repays the loan with interest by reversing the process and crediting the firm's demand deposit with a sum that exceeds the previous day's debit by the amount of the interest payment. Since the loans are maturing daily, the firm has virtually instant access to the full amount of its dollars on deposit with the bank.<sup>15</sup>

Overnight Eurodollars are counted in the TMS for the same reason as overnight RPs: they are basically an accounting fiction that permit U.S. banks to pay interest on their business demand deposits and are therefore virtually redeemable on demand. In the case of overnight Eurodollars, deposits are made by U.S. firms in interest bearing accounts at the Caribbean bank of a U.S. bank, where U.S. interest-rate regulations have no legal force. The dollars thus deposited plus interest earned are credited daily to the firms' demand deposit accounts held at the parent bank.<sup>16</sup>

Money market deposit accounts, as a hybrid of demand and savings deposits, are considered part of the TMS. MMDAs are federally insured up to \$100,000 per account, feature limited checking privileges, and offer par value cashability upon demand of the depositor.

Although MMMF share accounts at first glance look like MMDAs, they are clearly excludable from the TMS, because they are neither instantly redeemable, par value claims to cash, nor final means of payment in exchange. This requires a brief explanation of the nature of MMMFs.<sup>17</sup>

Each MMMF share represents a claim to a pro rata share of a managed investment portfolio containing short-term financial assets, such as high-grade commercial paper, certificates of deposit, and U.S. Treasury notes. Although the value of a share is nominally fixed, usually, at one dollar, the total number of shares owned by an investor (abstracting from reinvested dividends) fluctuates according to market conditions affecting the overall value of the fund's portfolio.<sup>18</sup> Under extreme circumstances, such as a stratospheric rise in short-term interest rates or the bankruptcy of a corporation whose paper the fund has heavily invested in, the fund's investors may well suffer a capital loss in the form of an actual reduction of the number of fixed-value shares they own. Unlike a check drawn on a demand deposit or MMDA, therefore, an MMMF draft does not simply represent a direct transfer of current claims to currency, but a dual order to the fund's manager to sell a specified portion of the shareowner's asset holdings and then to transfer the monetary proceeds to a third party named on the check.<sup>19</sup> Note that the payment process is not finally completed until the payee receives money, typically in the form of a credit to his demand deposit.<sup>20</sup>

Another feature that distinguishes checkable MMMF shares from demand deposits and MMDAs is the fact that the former cannot be permanently expanded beyond the limit set by the public's willingness to hold such assets. If an excess supply of fund shares happens to emerge, the consequence would not be the general rise in prices occasioned by people's attempts to rid themselves of surplus dollars through increased spending.<sup>21</sup> Unwanted MMMF shares simply go out of existence, as fund investors directly redeem them for money or use MMMF drafts to purchase alternative investment assets or consumers' goods. In the extreme case, if the public suddenly preferred to invest directly in the short-term credit market, without the intermediation of managed mutual funds, checkable MMMF shares would simply disappear from existence.

It is important to realize that the existence of MMMFs does have an effect on overall prices in the economy, but not because checkable fund shares constitute an addition to the money supply. Rather, the liquidity and checkability features of these assets permit their holders to reduce the amount of money they need to keep on hand to meet anticipated payments and to insure against future contingencies. This is also true, as we saw, of credit cards, which similarly provide their holders with access to an alternative payments system that economizes on money. By thus reducing the overall demand for money, MMMFs and credit cards encourage a higher rate of aggregate spending in the economy that results in a general rise in prices. However, the price increase associated with a given expansion of MMMFs is a "one-shot" phenomenon, whose magnitude is strictly governed by the corresponding reduction in the aggregate desired money balances of market participants. This sharply contrasts with inflation, which typically refers to a money-supply phenomenon involving a persistent decline in the purchasing power of the monetary unit that results from the creation of additional quantities of government fiat money, which, in theory, is limited only by the onset of a hyperinflationary currency breakdown.

Small-denomination time deposits refer mainly to federally-insured certificates of deposit (CDs) in denominations of less than \$100,000 and are excluded from the TMS because they involve loans by the public to banks and thrifts.<sup>22</sup> As time deposits, CDs nominally are not cashable on demand, but are payable in dollars only after a contractually fixed period of time ranging from thirty days to a number of years. However, the fact that issuing institutions stand ready to redeem these liabilities in current dollars at any time prior to maturity does constitute a theoretical argument for their inclusion in the TMS at their current redemption value. On the other hand, depositors do have a strong incentive to abstain from cashing small CDs before their maturity dates, because issuing institutions typi-

cally assess heavy penalties—varying from forfeiture of accrued interest to loss of part of the original principal—in the event of premature redemption. The ultimate decision to exclude this item was also heavily influenced by the practical problem of obtaining the data necessary to permit a reasonable estimate of its value in current dollars, i.e., net of penalty assessments.

### **Components of M3 Not Included in M2**

Large-denomination time deposits, such as CDs issued in denominations of at least \$100,000, are bona fide time liabilities, because they are not payable by the issuing institution before maturity.<sup>23</sup> Since they are not par value claims to immediately available dollars, they are excluded from the TMS. The same reasoning applies to the exclusion of term RPs and term Eurodollars from the TMS. The shares of "institution-only" MMMFs are excluded from the TMS for the same reasons as the shares of the "general purpose & broker/dealer" MMMFs included in M2.

### **Components of L Not Included in M3**

U.S. Savings Bonds are instantly cashable at the U.S. Treasury (or at banks and thrifts acting in its behalf) at a fixed discount from their face value.<sup>24</sup> As U.S. Treasury liabilities, moreover, their redeemability is "insured" by the full faith and credit of the Federal government. U.S. Savings Bonds are therefore included in the TMS at their redemption value, because they represent secure and current claims against the Treasury for contractually fixed quantities of the general medium of exchange.<sup>25</sup> In fact, U.S. Savings Bonds may usefully be treated as specific claims against "Treasury Cash," since this provides a rationale for the conventional omission of the latter item from money-supply statistics.<sup>26</sup>

In contrast to savings bonds, short-term Treasury securities are not payable before maturity and are therefore excluded from the TMS.

### **Memorandum Items**

Three items which are not included in any Fed measure of the money supply (M1, M2, M3) or even of overall "liquidity" (L) find a place in the TMS. These are the demand and other deposits held by the U.S. government, foreign official institutions, and foreign commercial banks at U.S. commercial and Fed banks.

The somewhat mysterious exclusion of these items from money-supply measures is typically justified by one recent writer who claims that the deposits of these institutions "... serve an entirely different purpose than the holdings of the general public" or are "... viewed as being held for 'peculiar' reasons."<sup>27</sup> This overemphasis on the particular "motives" for holding money, as opposed to the importance of the quantity of money itself, is one of the modern legacies of the Keynesian revolution.<sup>28</sup>

Moreover, there is nothing at all "peculiar" about the reasons for which such deposits are held. As one modern advocate of their inclusion in money-supply statistics points out:

The Treasury's deposits are not part of its reserve against money that it has issued, but are rather part of the general fund of the Treasury available for meeting general expenditures. Output is purchased and taxes are collected with the help of these deposits, and they would seem to be as much a part of the money stock with which the economy operates as are the deposits of state and local governments, which are included in adjusted demand deposits. Much the same may be said of Treasury deposits at Federal Reserve Banks. Also foreign-owned deposits at commercial banks are included, so why not foreign-owned deposits at the Federal Reserve?<sup>29</sup>

Finally, pre-Keynesian monetary theorists routinely and properly counted "U.S. Government Deposits" in the "Total Deposits" component of the money supply.<sup>30</sup> This was and is the proper procedure, because it is variations of the total stock of money owned by *all* economic agents that are of vital importance in analyzing and attempting to forecast inflation and business-cycle phenomena.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>Professor Rothbard presents the theoretical framework for this statistic in the following works: Murray N. Rothbard, *America's Great Depression* (Princeton, NJ: D. Van Nostrand, 1963), pp. 83-86; idem, "Austrian Definitions of the Supply of Money," in Louis M. Spadaro, ed., *New Directions in Austrian Economics* (Kansas City: Sheed Andrews & McMeel, 1978), pp. 143-56; and idem, *The Mystery of Banking* (New York: Richardson & Snyder, 1983), pp. 254-62.

<sup>2</sup>For a sample of recent contributions that have emphasized general acceptability in exchange as the defining characteristic of money, see: Lawrence H. White, "A Subjectivist Perspective on the Definition and Identification of Money," in Israel M. Kirzner, ed., *Subjectivism, Intelligibility and Economic Understanding: Essays in Honor of Ludwig M. Lachmann on His Eightieth Birthday* (London: The Macmillan Press, 1986), pp. 301-14; Dale K. Osborne, "What Is Money Today?" *Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas Economic Review* (January 1985), pp. 1-15; idem, "Ten Approaches to the Definition of Money," *Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas Economic Review* (March 1984), pp. 1-23; Leland Yeager, "What Are Banks?" *Atlantic Economic Journal* 6(December 1978): 1-14. Also see the classic article, Leland Yeager, "The Medium of Exchange" in R.W. Clower, ed., *Monetary Theory: Selected Readings* (Baltimore, MD: Penguin Books, 1970), pp. 37-60.

<sup>3</sup>For a similar view of credit cards see: Paul A. Meyer, *Monetary Economics and Financial Markets* (Homewood, IL: Richard D. Irwin, 1982), p. 34; and White, "Definition and Identification of Money," pp. 310-11.

<sup>4</sup>On this property of a pure commodity money, see, for example, Milton Friedman, "Commodity-Reserve Currency" in Milton Friedman, *Essays in Positive Economics* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1953), pp. 206-10.

<sup>5</sup>For a description of the unique process by which, in nominal terms, "the supply of money creates its own demand," see Yeager, "The Medium of Exchange," pp. 42-43; and idem, "What Are Banks?" pp. 6-7.

<sup>6</sup>As a former FDIC Chairman has recently written: "The pendulum has swung once again toward 100 percent protection of depositors and creditors. Despite the fact that Congress made it clear in the 1950 Act that FDIC was not created to insure all deposits in all banks, in the years since Congress has gradually increased the insured amount to \$100,000. In addition, the regulators have devised solutions that protect even the uninsured in the preponderance of cases." (Irvine H. Sprague, *Bailout: An Insider's Account of Bank Failures and Rescues* [New York: Basic Books, 1986], p. 32.) Moreover, the uninsured depositors who incurred losses in a handful of recent bank failures were mainly holders of deposits in the category of "large time deposits," which, for the reasons stated below, are not included in the TMS definition of the money supply. The FDIC's recent attempt to enforce market discipline on the banking industry by leaving the uninsured holders of large time deposits in small (but not large) banks unprotected appears to have had little substantive effect. On this, see R. Alton Gilbert, "Recent Changes in Handling Bank Failures and Their Effects on the Banking Industry," *The Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis Review* 67 (June/July 1985): 21-28.

<sup>7</sup>In his refusal to include "transactions balances," including demand deposits, in his statistical definition of the U.S. money supply, because they allegedly all cannot be spent simultaneously in any conceivable pattern of payments, Osborne ignores these institutional considerations. Thus, contrary to Osborne's contention, demand deposits in the U.S. today are indeed "means of simultaneous payment," precisely because, as the lender of last resort, the Fed is empowered to create base money ad libitum and would exercise this power to prevent a wholesale collapse of the fractional-reserve, multibank system. By neglecting this momentous institutional factor, the strict application of Shackle's "simultaneity" criterion to the empirical identification of the money stock leaves Osborne with only the monetary base as the "generally acceptable means of exchange," i.e. money, in the U.S. See Osborne, "What Is Money Today?" pp. 3-5.

<sup>8</sup>As Barger observes, "... it is the *bank deposit* which is money—not the check which transfers the deposit. Bank deposits are always acceptable: checks may not be, for sometimes they turn out to be made of rubber. If your creditor refuses your check, it's no doubt because he's not convinced he's getting title to a bank deposit." (Harold Barger, *Money, Banking and Public Policy*, 2nd ed. [Chicago: Rand McNally, 1968], pp. 16-17.) This is an obvious point, but White appears to overlook it in the significance he attaches to the limited "sphere of acceptance" of "ordinary bank checks [emphasis mine]." (White, "Definition and Identification of Money," p. 305.)

<sup>9</sup>Meyer is inconsistent in counting nonbank travelers' checks as part of the money supply merely because they are "means of payments." As Meyer recognizes in his discussion of credit cards, however, it is not enough that an item is able to serve as a means of payment in most transactions for it to be considered money; it must also serve, in his words, "to extinguish obligations between two parties," that is, serve as the *final* means of payment, to deserve the classification of money. See Meyer, *Monetary Economics*, pp. 33-34.

<sup>10</sup>For example, White argues that, because time deposits "... are not directly transferable, they do not serve as media of exchange, let alone as generally accepted media." (White, "Definition and Identification of Money," p. 310.) Yeager holds that the liabilities of nonbank financial intermediaries, such as deposits at S&Ls, are not money because they are not "routinely exchanged." (Yeager, "The Medium of Exchange," pp. 40-46, 53-56.)

<sup>11</sup>As Rothbard pertinently remarks, "... the 30-day notice [of withdrawal of savings deposits] is a dead letter; it is practically never imposed, and, if it were, there would be a prompt and devastating run on the bank. Everyone acts as if his time deposits were redeemable on



demand, and the banks pay out their deposits in the same way they redeem demand deposits. The necessity for personal withdrawal is merely a technicality; it may take a little longer to go down to the bank and withdraw the cash than to pay by check, but the essence of the process is the same. In both cases, a deposit at the bank is the source of monetary payment." (Rothbard, *America's Great Depression*, p. 84.)

<sup>12</sup>Today, many institutions permit such transfer to be effected by means of telephone. Interestingly, one weighted aggregate of "transactions assets," the "MQ" measure, includes "savings deposits subject to telephone transfer" while excluding conventional savings deposits. See Dallas S. Batten and Daniel L. Thornton, "Are Weighted Monetary Aggregates Better Than Simple-Sum M1?" *The Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis Review* 67 (June/July 1985): 29-40.

<sup>13</sup>In an early, though unfortunately neglected, contribution, Lin clearly recognized the economic equivalence of currency, demand deposits, and savings deposits, based on their "interchangeability" within the modern banking system. Thus, according to Lin,

The term 'means of payment' describes but one phase of the meaning of money. It indicates only in what form money is 'spent,' but not in what form it may be 'kept.' In the modern banking and monetary system money may be kept in one form and spent in another. This is possible and is always done today [1937] because all forms of money issued either by banks or by the state must be interchangeable to maintain parity. . . . Money in whatever form it is kept and spent must be of general acceptability and of free interchangeability. By these criteria, all other credit devices are automatically eliminated because they are not generally acceptable and cannot be freely interchanged into one another. Treasury currency, bank notes, time and demand deposits are . . . constantly interchanging into one another unit per unit without altering the total supply of money. (Lin Lin, "Are Time Deposits Money?" *American Economic Review* 27 [March 1937]: 85.)

For one of the earliest hints of recognition of the monetary function of time deposits, see Frank A. Fetter, *Economics*, vol. 2: *Modern Economic Problems*, 2nd ed. (New York: The Century Co., 1923), pp. 102-103.

<sup>14</sup>Melchior Palyi. *An Inflation Primer* (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1961), pp. 137-38.

<sup>15</sup>For a discussion of overnight RPs, see Meyer, *Monetary Economics*, p. 28.

<sup>16</sup>On overnight Eurodollars, see *ibid.*, pp. 28-29.

<sup>17</sup>The next three paragraphs, with some alterations, are drawn from Joseph T. Salerno, "What Investors and Depositors Should Know about Banks and the Financial Services Revolution," *Jerome Smith's Investment Perspectives* 2 (June 1984): 3-4. A more detailed analysis of the nature of MMMFs and of their relationship to the supply of and demand for money under the gold standard may be found in Joseph T. Salerno, "Gold Standards: True and False," *The Cato Journal* 3 (Spring 1983): 255-58.

<sup>18</sup>For a similar characterization of MMMFs, see Meyer, *Monetary Economics*, p. 29; and White, "Definition and Identification of Money," p. 310.

<sup>19</sup>"Typically, the funds establish a central clearing account at a bank. When checks, really drafts, written by individuals are presented to the bank, it notifies the mutual fund of the number of fund shares that must be liquidated to cover the check." (Monica Langley, "Holds on Checks Annoy Investors in Money Funds," *The Wall Street Journal* (November 11, 1986), p. 39.

<sup>20</sup>As White points out, ". . . the item that the check-writing MMMF customer relinquishes (ownership of shares in a portfolio of assets) is not

what the payee accepts (ownership of an inside-money claim to bank reserves). Because the actual MMMF shares are not what the second party accepts (or intends to accept), MMMF shares cannot be considered a generally accepted medium of exchange; hence, they are not money." (White, "Definition and Identification of Money," p. 310.)

<sup>21</sup>See above, pp. 2-3, for the description of this process.

<sup>22</sup>For details on institutional features of CDs, see Lester V. Chandler and Stephen M. Goldfeld, *The Economics of Money and Banking*, 7th ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), pp. 148-49; also see Meyer, *Monetary Economics*, p. 88.

<sup>23</sup>Chandler and Goldfeld, *Money and Banking*, pp. 148-49.

<sup>24</sup>Meyer, *Monetary Economics*, p. 152.

<sup>25</sup>In 1946, Fetter recognized savings bonds as "immediate purchasing power," and, as part of a comprehensive anti-inflation package, recommended the absorption of savings bonds "redeemable on demand" by exchanging them for long-term bonds and life annuities. (Frank A. Fetter, "Inflation's Basic Cause: Too Much Money," *Saturday Evening Post* [July 13, 1946], p. 124.) Palyi adopts a definition of the U.S. money supply that includes U.S. Savings Bonds at redemption value. However, from our medium-of-exchange perspective, Palyi goes too far afield by including in the money supply "highly liquid" assets such as Treasury securities of less than one year's maturity, commercial paper and bankers' acceptances. On the other hand, we sympathize with Palyi's apparent support for the inclusion of the cash surrender value of life insurance policies in money-supply figures. See Melchior Palyi, *The Twilight of Gold, 1914-1936: Myths and Realities* (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1972), pp. 301-15. Albert G. Hart and Peter B. Kenen present a statistical definition of "liquid assets of the nonbank public," including U.S. Savings Bonds and the "net cash values of life insurance," which comes very close to the TMS. There are no significant omissions, and the only clearly objectionable item is short-term government securities. See Albert G. Hart and Peter B. Kenen, *Money, Debt and Economic Activity*, 3rd ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall), pp. 3-6.

<sup>26</sup>Actually, "Treasury cash" refers to the small amount of Treasury-held gold which has not been monetized by the issue of gold certificates to the Fed in exchange for Treasury deposits. Nonetheless, since this "nonmonetized" gold stock may be converted into a stock of dollars at any time, via the issue of gold certificates to the Fed, it may be considered a monetary reserve for the redemption of savings bonds. On Treasury cash, see John G. Ranlett, *Money and Banking: An Introduction to Analysis and Policy*, 3rd ed. (New York: John Wiley, 1977), pp. 60-67.

<sup>27</sup>Meyer, *Monetary Economics*, pp. 26-27.

<sup>28</sup>In analyzing the Keynesian motives for holding money, Hart and Kenen cogently argue that "We cannot divide the cash balance of a given holder into definite parts representing each of these motives. . . . If, for example, he also has accumulated cash for speculative purposes, he also has a margin of safety, so that his needs under the [precautionary] motive are swallowed up in those under the [speculative motive]. Besides, the different motives shade into one another. In analyzing them, it is less important to keep them distinct than to keep track of the common element that binds them all together—the adaptation of business dealings to uncertainty." (Hart and Kenen, *Money, Debt and Economic Activity*, pp. 223-34.)

<sup>29</sup>Barger, *Money, Banking and Public Policy*, p. 53.

<sup>30</sup>See, for example: Edwin Walter Kemmerer, *High Prices and Deflation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1920), p. 27; Benjamin M. Anderson, *Economics and the Public Welfare: A Financial and Economic History of the United States, 1914-1946*, 2nd ed. (Indianapolis: Liberty Press, 1979), pp. 98, 183, 265; and Palyi, *The Twilight of Gold*, p. 36.

## 1986 Nobel Prize in Economic Science Awarded to James M. Buchanan

by  
Mark Thornton

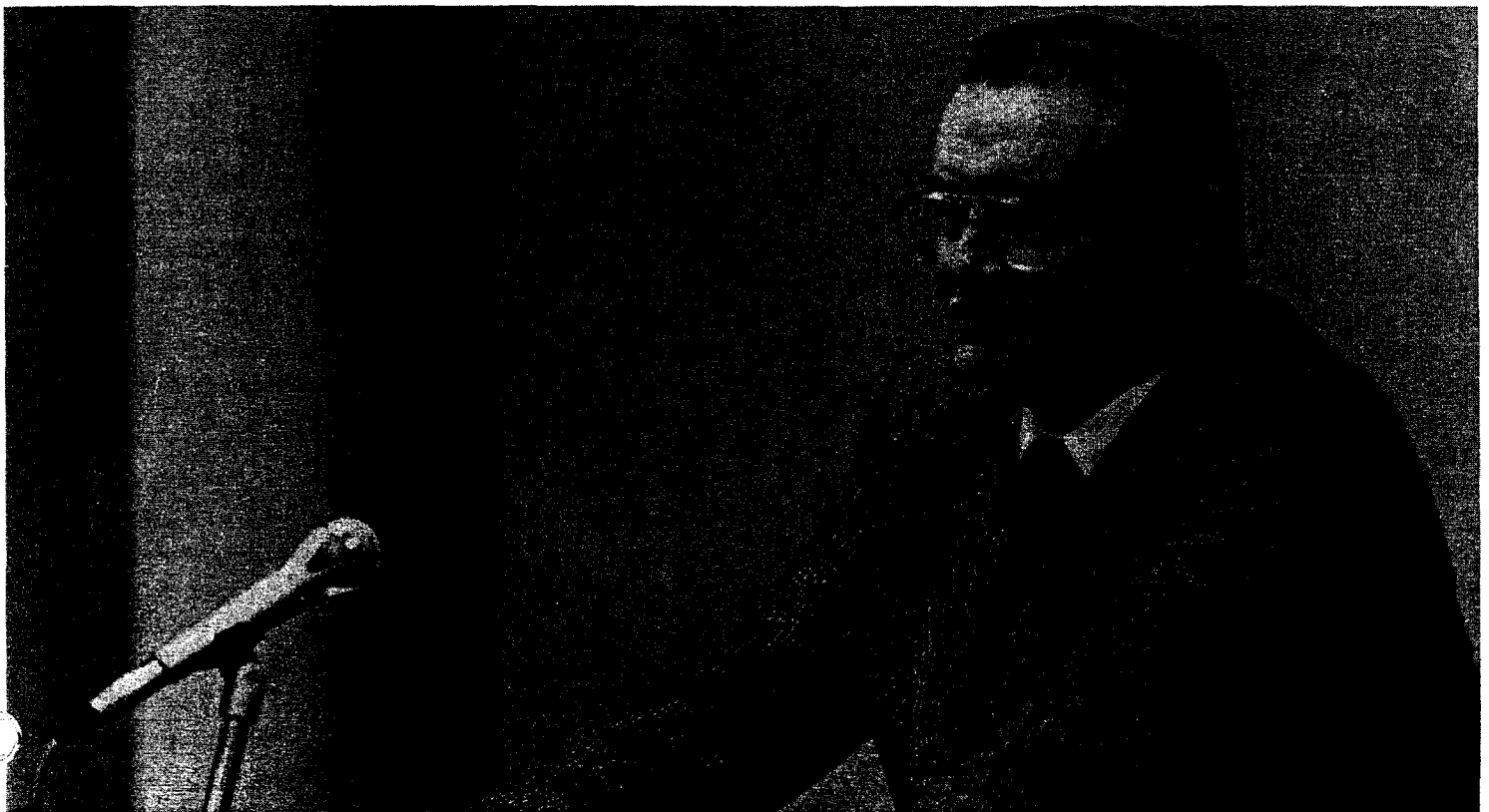
Austrian economists rarely celebrate the annual selection of the Nobel Prize in Economics. With the exception of F.A. Hayek, Austrians have had precious little in common with past Nobel Prize winners. James Buchanan, the 1986 Nobel Laureate and founder of the Public Choice school, is also a "fellow traveler" of the Austrian school.

The Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences awarded this year's prize to Buchanan for developing Public Choice theory and for his study of Constitutional economics. More specifically, for providing "explanations for political behavior that resemble those used to analyze behavior in markets." This represents a radical and new perspective for mainstream economics which tends to view the politician as selflessly endeavoring "to achieve certain macroeconomic or socioeconomic goals regarding employment, inflation, or growth rates." Buchanan's contributions have been criticized in the popular press as trivial, and unimportant. He has been branded a right-wing conservative, an ideologue, and a noneconomist. A proper assessment of Buchanan's contributions would show that he has had a tremendous impact on the economics profession. James Buchanan has had a long and productive career. It has also been a career riddled with controversy and confrontations.

The establishment of the Thomas Jefferson Center of Political Economy with Warren Nutter was one of Buchanan's earliest projects. Located at the University of Virginia, the Center soon began to attract a large group of scholars and graduate students, establishing itself as one of the most respected economics departments in the country. For the Virginia center, "market process was the focus of attention" developing such areas as property rights economics, law and economics, and public choice. At the height of Virginia's success, a secret university committee was formed to study the "political motivation" of the Center, and to reestablish a "political balance" similar to Harvard and Yale. James Buchanan and Gordon Tullock led the exodus from Charlottesville.

In 1969, Buchanan and Tullock relocated at Virginia Polytechnic Institute in Blacksburg, Virginia, while others dispersed across the country. At V.P.I. the Public Choice Society was formed and the journal, *Public Choice* was started.

The Public Choice Center soon began to attract some of the finest minds from around the United States, establishing V.P.I.'s economic department as one of the best. During the 1970s the influence of Public Choice analysis began to spread beyond the United States. Again, however, it was the success of the Center that ultimately led to its downfall. The unorthodox nature of the Public Choice perspective soon conflicted with internal university powers who sought changes such as more use of mathematics within



James M. Buchanan: 1986 Nobel Laureate

the graduate program. The conflict ultimately led to the decision in 1982 to move the Public Choice Center to George Mason University.

Buchanan has continued to do battle with the mainstream, which he refers to as "orthodox" economics. In his study of a free society, Buchanan has found that one of its enemies is the educational establishment which stifles the pursuit of ideas in favor of its own collective self-interest. He has also been critical of the use of mathematics and empirical techniques as the primary tool for graduate education.

Our graduate schools are producing highly trained, highly intelligent technicians who are blissfully ignorant of the whole purpose of their alleged discipline. They feel no moral obligation to convey and to transmit to their students any understanding of the social process through which a society of free persons can be organized without overt conflict while at the same time using resources with tolerable efficiency. ("Political Economy: 1957-1982," in *Liberty, Market, and State: Political Economy in the 1980s*, New York University Press, 1986.)

Buchanan shares much with the Austrian school of thought. Most importantly, methodological individualism and subjectivism are his starting points for extending the study of human action in the public sector. Viewing individuals in the public sector as self-interested (as Mises and Hayek did) provides us with a much more realistic picture of the world. Such works as *Cost and Choice* and *L.S.E. Essays on Cost* highlight Buchanan's work on the subjective nature of cost. His work has helped to revitalize the subjective nature of cost in the economics profession, to show that this was an Austrian contribution, and to demonstrate that the Austrian school was essentially correct in the socialist calculation debate.

Much of Buchanan's work in public choice and constitutional economics is complementary to, or an extension of, earlier Austrian contributions. The general Austrian criticism of government intervention, that the planner *cannot* calculate efficiently, is complemented by a major Public Choice conclusion, that planners and bureaucrats have *no incentive* to calculate efficiently. Buchanan also shares a process, rather than equilibrium approach to the study of economics. He is critical of the use of mathematical and optimizing procedures while extolling the importance of the history of economic thought and an understanding of institutions in making the world we live in intelligible. A deep sense of the importance of ideas and a commitment to a society free of coercion place him right next to, if not within, the modern Austrian tradition.

Although Buchanan has been described here as having at least one foot in the Austrian camp, he has created and

developed a unique research paradigm. Austrians, as a diverse school of thought, can find several points of disagreement with Buchanan.

Two main points of contention are Buchanan's use of social contract theory and implicit agreement, and his Knightian view of capital and money. Assuming implicit agreement with the social contract does fulfill a commitment to voluntary agreement, but it also places a heavy bias in support of the status quo. The Knightian view of capital is to assume that capital is homogeneous, and can be transformed into any final good or service. Austrians view capital goods as heterogeneous, used for the production of specific consumer goods. The uniqueness of the structure of capital plays a key role in the Austrian theory of the business cycle.

Among the many people who influenced Buchanan's thought, Frank Knight and Knut Wicksell played major roles. Buchanan studied under Frank Knight at the University of Chicago; he received his PhD in 1948 and was one of only two people to receive a PhD directed by Knight (the other was 1982 Nobel Laureate George Stigler). Knight represented the major force on the side of free markets in American academia during this period. The work of Knut Wicksell, the famous Swedish economist, proved to be an important starting point for Buchanan's contributions. It was while reading Wicksell's untranslated works that Buchanan made some of his important insights. Wicksell is also a subjectivist in the Austrian tradition (See "The Stockholm School of Economics: An Annotated Bibliography", by Richard Ebeling in the *Austrian Economist Newsletter*, Vol.3, No.2)

Austrian criticisms aside, a complete study of Buchanan's work would clearly show his pedestrian critics that their claims are wrong. First, he is neither right wing, nor left wing, but a self-described libertarian or classical liberal. He is not an ideologue, but rather a searcher for knowledge and truth, with a love for ideas. He is an economist among economists, helping to create a whole new body of thought. James Buchanan is an economist in the old sense of political economy, in which men's minds are focused on the problems facing society.

**Thornton** ..... continued from page 11

Austrian economics is a parasite on the mainstream, pointing out that while it is true that Austrians are critical of mainstream methods, they have their own methods and these methods have resulted in some of the most important elements of mainstream economics, namely marginalism and opportunity cost.

After a short lesson in the history of economic thought, Colander retreated from his position that the Austrians were parasites on the mainstream to describing the mainstream as a parasite on the Austrian School of Economics!



## The "Austrian Economics" of the Early Italian Economists

by  
**Robert W. McGee**  
Seton Hall University

The Austrian School of Economics did not develop out of thin air. It built upon the work of a number of other economists and philosophers going back as far as Aristotle. Among the precursors of the Austrian School were a number of Spanish and Italian scholastic economists.

Several early Italian economists influenced the development of continental European economic thought in the centuries before Carl Menger. Gian Francesco Lottini (1512-1572) had a rough idea that people value present wants higher than future wants — the basis of time preference theory. Bernardo Davanzati (1529-1606) applied subjective value theory to money, and solved the "paradox of value." He also pointed out that the price increases of his time were caused by the influx of gold from America, thus anticipating the quantity theory of money. Geminiano Montanari (1633-1687) had a fairly well developed quantity theory of money, and realized that there is a subjective factor involved in the valuation of money.

The Italian economist who had perhaps the most influence on the Austrian School was Ferdinando Galiani (1728-1787). Born in Chieti, he became a leader of the Italian Neopolitan School. His economic thinking was influenced by Aristotle, Davanzati, Locke and Montanari, among others.

Galiani is most noted for his contributions to value theory, interest theory and economic policy, topics that were explored a century later by Menger, Bohm-Bawerk, Jevons, Walras, Marshall and the German Historical School. He recognized that there was a dichotomy between utility and scarcity, a concept that had been kicked around by philosophers since Aristotle. His most notable work, *On Money*, was written when he was in his early twenties, but was not widely read then because it was available only in Italian. It is in that treatise that his interest and subjective value theories were included. In the mid-nineteenth century, Francesco Ferrara, another Italian, expanded on the subjective value theory and, according to Buchanan (p. 27) surpassed the subjective value theorists in some respects.

*Value Theory.* Galiani observed that a commodity's price regulates consumption, and consumption regulates price. As the price of a commodity falls, the demand for it increases, and vice versa. If a country producing and consuming 50,000 barrels of wine is suddenly invaded by a foreign army, the price of wine will go up because there are now more people to drink it. The value of a good is not intrinsic; it is a calculation or ratio between goods that people

make in relation to other goods. Men compare one good to another, and make an exchange only when their level of satisfaction will be equal as a result of the exchange. (Adam Smith and others have improved on this view, by observing that an exchange takes place when the value given up is subjectively less than the value received.) These views seem elementary now, but they were not so elementary when Galiani made them two centuries ago.

He also recognized the existence of the elasticity of demand. If the price of shoes increases, consumers can delay purchasing a pair and continue to wear the shoes they already have until the price comes down. But if the price of grain rises, consumers will continue to buy bread anyway. Otherwise, they would starve. The demand for shoes is highly elastic, whereas the demand for grain is inelastic. Marshall made a similar observation a century later.

Galiani also recognized the existence of a relationship between the price of a good and a demand for it. Rich people can afford a good that poorer people cannot. As the price of a good decreases, people from the less affluent income categories begin to purchase it, thus increasing total demand. If the price rises, some of these people will stop buying it. The rich make some purchases because it is fashionable to do so, even though the good purchased has little or no utility. It is fashionable to purchase diamonds, and unfashionable to purchase water or air. That is one reason why diamonds have a high price and water and air have a low price (or no price). This example also shows that there is a difference between value and utility. He realized that value is not intrinsic but subjective. A good's price varies with the taste and purchasing power of each individual.

Galiani was also aware of the law of diminishing marginal utility. When Davanzati stated that a living calf is both nobler and cheaper than a golden calf, and that a pound of bread is more useful than a pound of gold, Galiani replied that "useful" and "less useful" are relative concepts, and depend on individual circumstances. For someone who is in need of both gold and bread, bread is more useful. Choosing gold over bread in this case would lead to starvation. But once the individual has eaten his fill of bread, gold would be chosen over more bread. A single egg would be valued more highly by a starving man than all the gold in the world, and would be valued much less by the same man who had just finished eating. Thus, Galiani was aware of the ranking of goods, substitution of goods and diminishing marginal utility, topics discussed by Gossen, Walras, Jevons and Menger one hundred years later. Menger was aware of Galiani's views, as evidenced by his citation of Galiani in his *Principles of Economics* (p. 296).

*Interest Theory.* Bohm-Bawerk pointed out that Galiani was the first to see that interest was not a surplus, but is instead a supplement that is needed to equalize service and

counter-service. According to Galiani, interest equalizes present and future money. It is a means to compensate for the palpitations of the heart that a creditor must endure until the money is returned. It is a just payment to a creditor for the risk taken. This payment is for the convenience of the debtor, and compensates the creditor for the inconvenience that is incurred by not having the money for a certain period of time. The values are subjectively equal, but numerically different because they are separated by time. Bohm-Bawerk criticized Galiani's theory because Galiani viewed interest only as the price of palpitations or the price of insurance. Bohm-Bawerk expounded on the time preference aspect of interest, an area Galiani neglected.

*Economic Policy.* Galiani believed that government generally should not interfere in the natural workings of the economy. A government that attempts to stimulate all sectors of the economy, agricultural and industrial, stimulates nothing. Stimulation means that a particular sector is given preference over the other sectors, and how can one sector be given preference over another if all sectors are stimulated?

Another aspect of his economic policy theory is that an economic policy must be formulated by taking time and place into account; an economic policy that may be appropriate in one country or at one time may be inappropriate in another. Unlike the physiocrats, Galiani argued that agriculture need not always be viewed as supreme. The view that economic models must be adjusted for time and place later became a basic principle of the German Historical School, the school that later debated the validity of Carl Menger's methodology. But, unlike the German Historical School, Galiani did not reject abstract theory.

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## Southern Economics Association—1986

by  
Mark Thornton

The 56th Annual Conference of the second oldest and second largest professional association for economists displayed the growing interest in Austrian economics. Austrian economists and "fellow travelers" participated in a number of sessions and panel discussions that reflected Austrian themes and interests. The convention was highlighted by a luncheon in honor of James Buchanan, the 1986 Nobel Laureate in economics, and by the election of Austrian economist, Karen Vaughn as first Vice-President of the Association.

The luncheon in honor of James Buchanan featured testimonials by the past, present, and future presidents of the association: Robert Tollison, William Breit and Dennis Muller. A major theme of the testimonials was Buchanan's success in light of his unorthodox paradigm and ongoing battles with mainstream economics, historicism, and the American Economic Association, to name a few. They also talked of Buchanan's basic love of ideas, his search for knowledge and truth, and his stubborn persistence as the main ingredients in the success of establishing the "public choice revolution".

Elected as first Vice-President of the Association, Karen Vaughn is the first Austrian economist to hold high office in the Association in some time. She is currently the department chairman at George Mason University, home of the Center for the Study of Market Processes and the Public Choice Center. Her work involves a variety of Austrian themes as well as study of constitutional economics and the economic thought of John Locke.

Among the familiar names presenting papers were Jack High, Larry Moss, Gerald O'Driscoll, Jr., Karen Vaughn, and Leland Yeager. Two recent Austrian graduates and Mises Institute Fellows, Don Boudreaux of Auburn University, and George Selgin of New York University, both now at George Mason University, participated in two sessions. The program also included Tom DiLorenzo, John Egger, Thomas Humphrey, Richard Timberlake, and Lawrence White.

Gerald O'Driscoll, formerly of New York University, and now Senior Economist at the Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas, presented his paper "Money: Menger's Evolution-

ary Approach," in an invited session on Monetary Theory. The paper, which details the importance of Menger's insights, was discussed by Richard Timberlake of the University of Georgia. The paper was recently published in the winter issue of *History of Political Economy*.

Don Boudreaux, former editor of the *Austrian Economics Newsletter*, presented two papers at the convention. In a session on the History of Economic Thought he presented (with co-author George A. Selgin) "L.A. Hahn: A Predecessor of Keynes and Lucas". In a session on Monetary Theory and Policy he presented a paper, co-authored with his wife Katherine Boudreaux, entitled "The Effect of Changes in the Average Length of Government Debt on the Rate of Money-Supply Growth," where they show that not only the amount of debt but the length of the term of government debt, has affected, and will affect, the behavior of the Central Bank in inflating the money supply.

Leland B. Yeager, the Ludwig von Mises Professor at Auburn University, also presented two papers; the first one entitled "Confessions of a Former Floater," reflected the eroding confidence in the international currency and financial markets to organize and control international economic activity in today's inflationary and protectionist environment. The paper concludes with the suggestion for a return to a fixed rate system, based on commodity money. The B.F.H. System, where the medium of exchange separated from the unit of account, is offered as a possible solution.

Yeager also presented "The Significance of Monetary Disequilibrium" in an invited session on Monetary Disequilibrium and the Keynesian Diversion which was chaired by Richard Timberlake. The session also featured James Dorn, editor of the *Cato Journal*, who presented "Clark Warburton on the Keynesian Diversion". John Egger, of the Institute for Research on the Economics of Taxation, presented "Arthur Marget's Catallactic Theory of Money", and Robert Hertz, from the Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond, "The Keynesian Departure from Classical Theories of the Money Supply Process". Discussants included Thomas Humphrey of the Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond, Robert Keleher of the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta and Anna Schwartz of the National Bureau of Economic Research.

Karen Vaughn chaired an invited session on Spontaneous Orders and Social Institutions. Lawrence Moss of Babson College presented "Joseph Storey, Spontaneous Orders and the Practice of Judicial Reasoning" in which he showed that Justice Storey, who believed in the evolution of law, could also "actively" speed this process up by using successful elements of other legal systems. George Selgin presented "The Evaluation of a Wildcat Banking System" (co-authored with Lawrence White of New York University). The paper investigated the development of institu-

tions in an environment of free banking. The presentation combined a cogent methodological discussion with a market process analysis to show that institutions would emerge and evolve to stabilize a free banking industry.

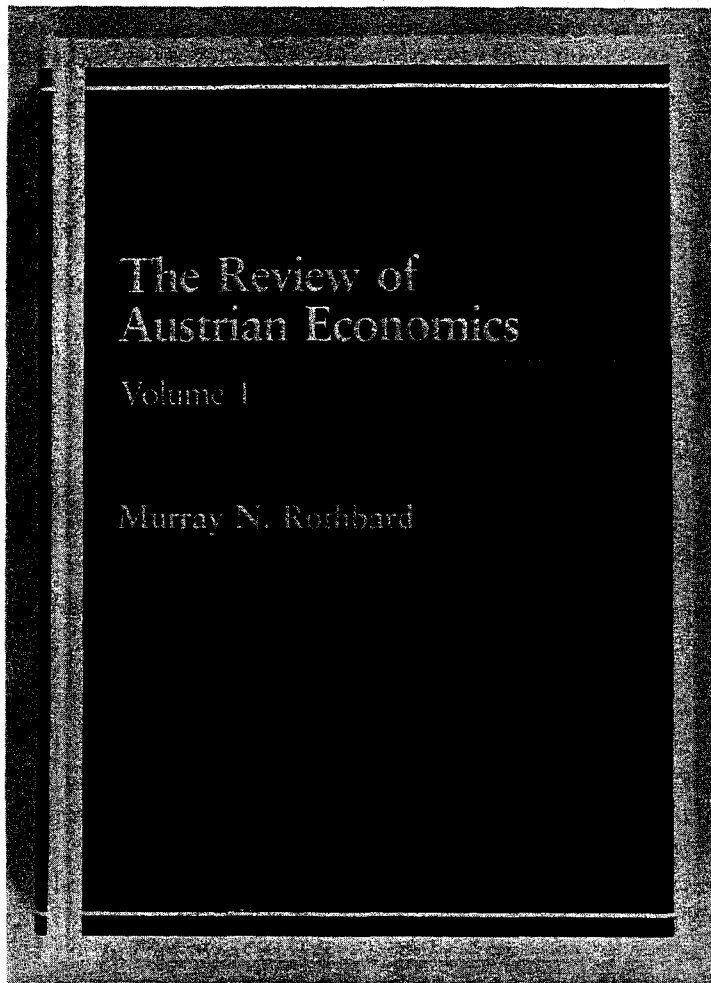
Other papers of interest were Thomas DiLorenzo and Jack High's "Antitrust and Competition Historically Considered" and Catherine England's "Agency Problems and the Banking Firm: A Theory of Unregulated Banking". William Breit's Presidential Address, "Biography and the Making of Economic Worlds," stresses the importance of knowing the life of an economist in understanding and "interpreting" theory—a hermeneutical twist to the history of economic thought!

Last but not least was a session on The Economic Mind-Set, chaired by Frank Forman of the U.S Department of Education. David Colander was given the task of defending the mainstream. Colander, critical of the mainstream himself, found comfort in the fact that the mainstream models are easier to teach and had "solutions". He noted that the mainstream techniques provide many jobs for economists and an "excess capacity" of economists in case they were suddenly called on to solve some major crisis. He initially characterized Austrians (and other "fringe" economists) as parasites, only viable as long as they criticize the mainstream. His answer was to invite all the "fringe" groups into the mainstream, to act in unison, and correct all that is wrong with the mainstream from within.

Frank Forman's paper "Beyond Mechanism and Spiritualism," was very complimentary to Austrian economics but also argued for saving important elements of mainstream thought. He sought the "middle ground" by redefining competition as "changing the production function". The only discussant, Morris Coats of Nichols State University, focused on this definition in his comments. He invoked Kirzner in criticizing Forman's definition of competition, claiming that it was narrow and lacked "human action". After Jack High presented his "A Defense of Austrian Economics," the floor was open to discussion.

It became obvious in the discussion that followed that the main point of contention was between Austrian economics and the mainstream. Jack High admitted that he would like to see more dialogue between the Austrians and the mainstream but that it had to be a two-way street. He went on to attack several issues in Colander's discussion. In particular, he contested the idea that increased employment for economists is a justification for mainstream economics, or that Austrian economics is laden with value judgments while the mainstream is not. He countered Colander's points by saying that economists from all paradigms have value judgments, and that this is a good thing because it provides an incentive to search out knowledge and truth. He also rebuffed Colander's contention that

(Continued on page 8)



## Review of Austrian Economics

The long-awaited *Review of Austrian Economics* is now available. The annual journal, published in hardback by Lexington Books, is available from the Ludwig von Mises Institute, from some professional bookstores, and from the publisher. Editor Murray N. Rothbard and Associate Editor Walter Block have compiled a fine first volume of original articles, review essays, and book reviews. The purpose of the *Review* is to provide a forum for the discussion of topics of particular interest to Austrian economists, and of topics of general interest from an Austrian perspective.

The RAE is a refereed publication open to manuscripts covering all traditional economic fields. Besides encompassing all strands of Austrian thought, the *Review* will present "non-Austrian," and even "anti-Austrian" viewpoints of interest to Austrian economists. Brisk sales and the large number of manuscript submissions for Volume Two have already encouraged both the editors and the publisher eventually to bring the *Review* out as a semi-annual, and ultimately as a quarterly journal.

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