

Philipp Wilhelm von Hörnigk, “Austria Supreme, If It so Wishes” (1684)

Abstract

The book from which the following excerpt derives gained fame in its time and thereafter as a confidence-inspiring account of state-guided, tariff-protected, population-expanding, bullion-hoarding (i.e., “mercantilist”) economic development. Its prescription strongly influenced eighteenth-century Austrian economic policy, and that of Prussia and other German states as well. In C.A. Macartney’s judgment, “it constitutes perhaps the clearest exposition to be found anywhere outside France of the fashionable mercantilist theories of the day.” The book’s author, Philipp von Hörnigk, was born in Frankfurt and after studying at the universities of Mainz, Leuven and Ingolstadt made a career for himself as a civil servant in Vienna. He is considered one of the founders of cameralism.

Source

[...]

Chapter I

I have set myself to prove that Austria can be over all, if she only wills it. [...] Under my “Austria” I understand not only the world-famed Archduchy of that name on the two sides of the Danube, but also the whole hereditary Kingdom and Lands of the German Archducal House of Austria, whether lying inside or outside the Roman Empire, thus including Hungary. [...] The excellence in question I find in that superfluity, either existing or potentially existing, of human necessities and amenities, independent of other nations, in respect of gold and silver, which has perhaps hitherto been little recorded and is therefore unsuspected, which I ascribe to our Austria and put, so to speak, at her disposition. [...]

And would to God it were as easy to inspire Austria with the will to draw the proper benefit from her natural gifts and advantages as it is to prove the manifest fact that her salvation and recovery truly depend – after God’s help alone – solely on her own will.

[...]

Chapter II

[...]

[*When I look who should lead Germany to cast off its economic dependence on France*], [...] no one is able to do so with more confident prospect of success than his Roman Imperial Majesty, in view not only of his supreme Imperial dignity and prerogatives, but especially of his far-flung Hereditary Kingdom and Dominions so blessed by God and nature, all subject in the same dependence on a single head, all mutually contiguous and thus forming, as it were, a single body, of which the one part can out of its superfluity supply the shortages and needs of others, and is thus so amply endowed with abundance beyond all wishing of raw materials and great domestic consumption thereof that they can rightly boast, more than any other land in Europe, to constitute almost a little world in themselves and to be supplied, without help from abroad, not only with necessities but with luxuries, if only assisted with the right institutions.

[...]

Chapter VI

[*The development of these lands into an economic autarky is the more necessary because of the changed political situation*]

[...] A hundred years ago, when pressed by the Turks and others, our forefathers could still rely on the Roman Empire and its other Princes. But in our days, the guile of France has thrown all into such confusion that man can place his confidence only in God and in himself, and hardly anyone will give another the smallest neighborly help, unless it is also in his own interest, without payment in cash. Therefore every man is well advised to look to himself. For he fares well who in time of need has money in his own purse, let him who has it not at once resolve to be the abject servant, not only of the enemy but of friends and helpers. Against such misfortune Austria can at any time guard herself, if she but will, with a third of the money that now goes out of the country, mostly to France, for quite unnecessary things.

[...]

Chapter IX

If, then, the power and excellence of a country lie in its superfluity of gold, silver and all other things necessary and desirable for its subsistence, all, as far as possible, from its own stocks, without dependence on others and further, in the proper cultivation, use and application thereof, it follows that a national economic system has to see how such superfluity, cultivation and enjoyment can be brought into being out of native resources, without dependence on others or, where this is not completely possible, then with as little dependence as possible and with all possible economy of the national finances. To which end the following nine rules must chiefly serve.

First: the nature of the country must be exactly observed and surveyed, every corner, every clod of earth examined to see whether it be cultivable. Every useful plant under the sun shall be examined to see whether it could flourish in the country and how well, since the proximity of the sun, or its reverse, is not everything. In all that concerns gold and silver, no labor or expense should be spared to bring them to light.

Secondly, all commodities in a country which cannot be used raw are to be processed at home; since the cost of manufacture usually exceeds that of the raw material by twice, thrice, ten, twenty, sometimes a hundredfold, and a sensible economist must shudder to throw this away.

Thirdly, men are necessary to put these rules into effect, both to produce and transport, and to cultivate the raw materials and to process them. Regard must therefore be had to populating a country with as many men as it can support – the business, alas! often neglected, of a well-ordered State. And all possible ways and means must be found to bring these men out of idleness into productive employment, to teach them and encourage them in all inventions, arts, and handicrafts, and, if necessary, to have instructors brought in from abroad.

Fourthly, gold and silver, once in the country, whether home-produced or brought in from abroad through industry, are in no way or fashion, so far as is at all possible, to be allowed to leave it again, nor allowed to remain buried in chests and strongboxes, but always kept in circulation; nor are they to be allowed to be fashioned into forms where they are, as it were, made useless and unserviceable. For so it will be impossible for a country which once acquires a considerable stock, especially one which has its own gold and silver mines, to fall into poverty, impossible, indeed, for it not to increase continuously in wealth and property. Therefore,

Fifthly, the inhabitants are to be most strongly enjoined to content themselves with their domestic products, to limit their indulgence and display to these, and as far as possible, to renounce foreign ones (except in case of absolute necessity or if not necessity, irremediable bad habits which have crept in, such as the use of Indian spice). And,

Sixthly, what is indispensable, of necessity or through irremediable bad habit, should wherever possible not be bought directly from abroad for gold or silver, but be exchanged against other domestic products.

Seventhly, such foreign products shall then be acquired in their raw state and processed at home and the cost of manufacture earned there.

Eighthly, day and night watch must be kept that surplus home products be sold abroad in manufactured form, so far as this is necessary, and for gold and silver, and to this end consumers must be sought out, so to speak, from the ends of the world and exports promoted in every way.

Ninthly, failing important reasons to the contrary, products available domestically in sufficient quantity and of adequate quality should never be allowed to be imported; no sympathy or pity for the foreigner should affect this policy, whether he be friend, kinsman, ally, or enemy. For all friendship stops when it conduces to my own weakness and destruction. And this applies even when the domestic product is worse in quality or even more expensive. For, strange as it may appear to ill-informed minds, it is better to give two thalers which remain in the country for an object, than one thaler that goes abroad.

[...]

Chapter X

[*The author now turns to enumerating the natural resources of Austria. We omit his somewhat particular description of its resources in gold, silver and salt. He then points out that for food and drink, man needs cereals, fruit, milk products, vegetables, meat, fish, etc., and goes on:*]

[...]

Anyone who knows the common saying that the Hereditary Dominions were really made for eating and drinking can easily imagine that all these things are present, not only in abundance but in superfluity. Hardly one of all the Provinces lacks sufficiency of any of them (saffron excepted). And if one, such as Silesia, lacks wine, it can get it from the nearest co-Province, so that the money spent on this, too, remains, so to speak, at home. Only the Tirol draws its supplies of bread from some foreign neighbors, but more for convenience than of necessity; the barns of other Austrian Provinces could assuredly supply its needs. And for the rest, most products, such as salt, wheat, wine, cattle, swine, fish, vinegar, brandy, fruit, etc. are present in such abundance that the only complaint is where to dispose of them all. As it is, the inhabitants are almost driven to knavery to get rid of the surplus to prevent its going bad. Austria and Bohemia lead the way in this superfluity, but above all, Hungary, which should really be regarded as Europe's Promised Land. Its soil is so fruitful that ordinary seed yields the finest wheat flour in the second crop and the grass almost covers the backs of the grazing cattle. The water is so full of fish that it is hardly an extravagance to say that the Tisza in Upper Hungary carries between its banks two parts of water and one of fish. The wine of some districts, such as Tokay, can vie with the best in the world. The fields resound with the voices of beasts, great and small. The farmyard practically overflows with poultry, the air teems with its feathered denizens – in a word, Hungary is a real mine of bread, fat, and meat. I will say no more, lest I be held a hired panegyrist.

After the fruit comes the shell, or the clothing, and what appertains thereto. For this, the provinces yield wool, flax, and hides. Bohemian wool, especially the long wool of the district of Pilsen, is the best for making good stuffs, Silesia comes next after Bohemia in quantity and quality, then Moravia. Austria and

Hungary have enough, but of poor quality. Linen manufacture is truly at home, as it were, in Silesia, Upper Austria, and parts of Inner Austria, whence many neighboring lands and some further afield used to supply themselves, and still do; and they still have ample for the Hereditary Provinces. It is obvious that the stock raising of which I spoke and the abundant game preserves must necessarily produce a superfluity of hides of all kinds (except the expensive fine furs). There are even tame “kinglets” and beaver fur. After the shell comes the husk, viz., the housing, for which earth and clay, timber and stone are required. Of these there is no shortage, in respect either of quantity or quality. I need not dwell on it. There is even excellent marble and other valuable stone for the labor of quarrying and carting them. The Caplier Castle of Milnschau in Bohemia is built on a rock of pure jasper. Finally, all the other necessities of human existence are there; all kinds of tools and furniture and ornaments, of which many are fashioned out of the stone, earths, gold, silver, wool, linen, leather, etc., mentioned above. Others are made of the lesser metals, of which, with the exception of one not found to my knowledge elsewhere in the known world except China, not one is lacking in our Provinces. For copper and iron are present in nearly all of them. Bohemia has long supplied Schlackenwald tin, without which even English tin cannot be properly worked. And now Geyersberg is producing such quantities of it that it looks as though soon half the world could be supplied with it; it is not a hairsbreadth worse than the English. There is lead in Carinthia, near Villach, some in Bohemia, sufficient in Hungary, and allegedly in Schlamming, near Admont in Upper Styria, an ore, not yet exploited, contains 60 lb. of lead to the hundredweight. Idria produces quicksilver so lavishly that if it were fully exploited and properly marketed it could supply the whole world, hence it is regarded as a jewel of the Monarchy. Under this heading come also minerals, the most important of which – sulphur, coppers and antimony – Hungary alone, not to speak of the others, produces enough to supply the world. All the others again, are present in abundance and superabundance, one here, the other there; Hungary has a practical monopoly of mountain green. In Tirol there is cadmium, out of which some brass is prepared. Where, then, a place possesses all metals and minerals, the materials for metallic coloring cannot be far away, if the trouble to look for them is taken. Of the salts, there is rock salt or salt pans enough everywhere, an abundance in Hungary; Bohemia seems like the very father of alum, since there is an incredible mountain of this near the Meissen frontier, if only a market for it could be found. Of timber, the principal constituent of all sorts of implements needed for human existence, there is in places so much, such regrettable superfluity, that he would be doing a great service who showed a way to be rid of it at a profit. There is plenty of it also for ships’ masts and hulls, not to mention other purposes. Precious stones, too, come under this heading as the chief adornments. Of these, Hungary gives us opals and jade, Bohemia the finest garnets, though small, and also lapis lazuli, diamonds, amethysts, sapphires, topazes, cornelians, aquamarine, agate, jasper, all kinds of colors, pearls – although of somewhat inferior quality – and the agreeable serpentine.

Of wax, tallow, horns, glass, bones, pitch, horsehair, buck’s hair, feathers, and other similar products which serve human needs no less than the objects listed above there is nothing further to say beyond this: that seeing the superfluity of the bees, cattle, linen, etc., of which these are the by-products, there can be no shortage of them either. But neither should we forget that very efficient living instrument of human labor, the horse, for which Hungary, above all, is famous, then Bohemia; but there is no shortage in any of the other Provinces – in most, a superfluity, and equally little shortage of other necessary European beasts of burden.

[...]

Chapter XV

[...]

[Hörnigk goes on to argue, with some repetition, that there is practically no commodity necessary for human existence in which “Austria” is not self-sufficient and that she could easily do without practically any imports if she would consume her native products instead of running after foreign ones. Neither is it the

case that her inhabitants are stupid – many of her products have long enjoyed high reputations. Silesian cloth, in particular (he comes back to this point several times) is bought cheaply by Dutch traders, processed in the Netherlands, and sold back expensively as a Dutch product. These final processes could just as easily be carried out at home, as could the processing of silk.]

It is true, some districts in Austria are more industrious than others; the inhabitants of the wine-growing districts are not only commonly accused of themselves caring more for their own glasses than for work, but within a few years they make the foreign artisans, who are imported like themselves, idlers and good-for-nothings. The beer-producing districts work much harder. And if in some places, as in the flat parts of Bohemia, where the land laughs for abundance of corn and cattle, and where it is worth while producing wine, the industry and application of the inhabitants leave something to be desired, the mountains [of German Bohemia] are, on the other hand, full of stout, hard-working men. In Vienna itself, where indulgence and love of gay living has become, as it were, a general tradition, neither skill nor application would be lacking for manufactures, given only the will, encouragement, and leadership. [...]

Chapter XVIII

[Hörnigk then discusses how far his “nine rules” are observed in Austria, and after giving, with reason, examples to show how each one of them is habitually broken, he writes:]

[...]

There is a saying: If one is good, they are all good; but I say now: If one of these rules were ever properly observed among us, so would they all be. But in fact, no one of them is observed. Nothing is sound with us, from head to foot. And is it any wonder that the lands are poor in money, or is the cause far to seek? Rather, things are in such a condition that it is something like an Austrian miracle that everything has not yet gone to total ruin long ago.

[...] Yet I would fain believe that we are not yet so far rejected by God that no hope more should remain. I rather comfort myself that Heaven will yet bring us some men who will help our unhappy Fatherland to acquire these blessings as the chosen implement of God. Blessed Imperial realms and blessed day when we shall experience this salvation! Most dear, ever most glorious Emperor, who shall thus, by firm resolution and unshakable institutions, console the sad and distressful land and peoples entrusted to him by God and help them out of the present slough of penury and want. Yes, blessed Turkish affliction, blessed devastation of Austria, welcome flight from Vienna, if the effect of you is that at last eyes are opened, hands set working, and through you, as when part of a cargo is jettisoned, the whole decrepit ship of our common life, nigh to foundering in the storm, is snatched to safety from the violent tempest and from destruction. [...]

Chapter XX

Yes, I say, the salvation must come from the Princes of our people, for the people can do nothing without them. [...]

[The rest of Hörnigk’s remarks do not lend themselves to extracts; we will say here only that the first and chief step advocated by him is an absolute prohibition on the importation of all manufactured woolens, linen goods, silks, and all other commodities known as “French manufactures.” The money saved on these imports, estimated by Hörnigk at ten million gulden yearly, is to be spent on establishing local manufactures. It is also interesting that he recommends that the guild system should, at least at first, not be allowed “in the manufactures which are not yet established in the dominions, but are still to be introduced.”]

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