

KAVAFIS AND MISES: MEANS AND END

SPYROS MALLIOS*

Fecha de recepción: 3 de noviembre de 2012.

Fecha de aceptación: 19 de diciembre de 2012.

I MISES

1. Means and End as Abstract Methodical Tools

Mises stated¹ that in his theory of human action he starts from the axiom that an individual I_1 .

* Graduate student, Máster en Economía de la Escuela Austriaca, Universidad Rey Juan Carlos. The idea of this paper was formed when Professor Jesús Huerta de Soto presented the different points of view between Kavafis and Mises in a lecture at the Rey Juan Carlos University at the 25th of October of 2012. I would like to thank the Lilian Voudouri Foundation (Athens, Hellenic Republic) for the scholarship it provided me for my graduate studies at Universidad Rey Juan Carlos for the academic year 2012/2013.

¹ «To act means: to strive after ends, that is, to choose a goal and to resort to means in order to attain the goal sought.» Mises, Ludwig von, 2002 [1962], *The Ultimate Foundation of Economic Science*, p. 4, New York: Foundation for Economic Education.

«The sciences of human action start from the fact that man purposefully aims at ends he has chosen.», Mises, Ludwig von, 2007 [1957], *Theory and History*, p. 3, Auburn, Alabama, USA: Ludwig von Mises Institute.

«The result sought by an action is called its end, goal, or aim. [...] A means is what serves to the attainment of any end, goal, or aim.», Mises, Ludwig von, 1966 [1949], *Human Action*, p. 92, San Francisco: Fox & Wilkes, Fourth Revised Edition.

«Value is the importance that acting man attaches to ultimate ends. Only to ultimate ends is primary and original value assigned. Means are valued derivatively according to their serviceableness in contributing to the attainment of ultimate ends. Their valuation is derived from the valuation of the respective ends. They are important for man only as far as they make it possible for him to attain some ends.» Mises, Ludwig von, 1966 [1949], *Human Action*, p. 96, San Francisco: Fox & Wilkes, Fourth Revised Edition.

1. Chooses a certain end E_1 and puts aside other ends $E_2, E_3, \dots, E_n$ that he considers he could choose instead of the end E_1 , and
2. He chooses, among the means $M_1, M_2, M_3, \dots, M_n$ which he considers will enable him to attain his chosen end, the means M_1 which he prefers and puts aside the other means $M_2, M_3, \dots, M_n$ that he considers he could choose instead of the means M_1 . (The Axiom of Human Action)

Mises considers the terms *End* and *Means* abstract methodical tools which an individual may use to analyse human action. In other words, Mises does not consider something to be a *Means* or an *End* by itself (in an objective sense), but it is an individual who may consider it a *Means* or an *End*.

A means is what serves to the attainment of any end, goal, or aim. Means are not in the given universe; in this universe there exist only things. A thing becomes a means when human reason plans to employ it for the attainment of some end and human action really employs it for this purpose. Thinking man sees the serviceableness of things, i.e., their ability to minister to his ends, and acting man makes them means. It is of primary importance to realize that parts of the external world become means only through the operation of the human mind and its offshoot, human action. External objects are as such only phenomena of the physical universe and the subject matter of the natural sciences. It is human meaning and action which transform them into means.²

2. Means and End as Achronical Methodical Tools

Moreover, Mises considers the terms *End* and *Means* as achronical (out of time) methodical tools. Therefore, an individual I_1 may consider an action of his an *End* and a *Means* at the «same time».

For example:

² Mises, Ludwig von, 1966 [1949], *Human Action*, p. 92, San Francisco: Fox & Wilkes, Fourth Revised Edition.

1. Individual I_1 wants to go for a trip and he chooses D_1 as his end (destination) and he puts aside $D_2, D_3, \dots, D_n$ that he considers he could choose instead of the end D_1 .
2. However, individual I_1 does not want to go to D_1 merely because he wants to be there. He wants to go to D_1 in order to attain a chosen end E_1 (e.g. to be entertained, to meet a certain individual, to participate in recreational activities or for another purpose). Therefore, D_1 is now considered a means that individual I_1 chose in order to attain his end E_1 .

On the other hand:

3. Individual I_1 needs to choose, among the means $T_1, T_2, T_3, \dots, T_n$ which he considers will enable him to attain his chosen end D_1 (e.g. travelling by airplane, train, car, bicycle, walking or an other means), a means of transportation T_1 which he prefers and to put aside the other means $T_2, T_3, \dots, T_n$ that he considers he could choose instead of the means T_1 .

In summary, individual I_1 :

1. Chooses end E_1 and puts aside other ends $E_2, E_3, \dots, E_n$ that he considers he could choose instead of the end E_1 .
2. Chooses, among the means $D_1, D_2, D_3, \dots, D_n$ which he considers will enable him to attain his chosen end E_1 , the means D_1 which he prefers and puts aside the other means $D_2, D_3, \dots, D_n$ that he considers he could choose instead of the means D_1 .
3. Chooses, among the means $T_1, T_2, T_3, \dots, T_n$ which he considers will enable him to attain his chosen end D_1 , the means T_1 which he prefers and puts aside the other means $T_2, T_3, \dots, T_n$ that he considers he could choose instead of the means D_1 .

Therefore, in this example D_1 is considered by individual I_1 a means and an end at the «same time».

Human life is an unceasing sequence of single actions. But the single action is by no means isolated. It is a link in a chain of

actions which together form an action on a higher level aiming at a more distant end. Every action has two aspects. It is on the one hand a partial action in the framework of a further-stretching action, the performance of a fraction of the aims set by a more far-reaching action. It is on the other hand itself a whole with regard to the actions aimed at by the performance of its own parts.³

II KAVAFIS

Kavafis states⁴:

When you start on the way to Ithaca,
wish that the way be long,
full of adventure, full of knowledge.
The Laestrygones and the Cyclopes
and angry Poseidon, do not fear:
such, on your way, you shall never meet
if your thoughts are lofty, if a noble
emotion touch your mind, your body.
The Laestrygones and the Cyclopes
and angry Poseidon you shall not meet
if you carry them not in your soul,
if your soul sets them not up before you.

Wish that the way be long,
that on many summer mornings,
with great pleasure, great delight,
you enter harbours for the first time seen;
that you stop at Phoenician marts,
and procure the goodly merchandise,
mother-of-pearl and corals, amber and ebony,
and sensual perfumes of all kinds,
plenty of sensual perfumes especially;

³ Mises, Ludwig von, 1966 [1949], *Human Action*, p. 45, San Francisco: Fox & Wilkes, Fourth Revised Edition.

⁴ Kavafis Constantinos P., *Ιθάκη* in *Ποιήματα 1897-1933*, 'Ικαρος 1984, translated by George Valassopoulos and published as *Ithaca* in *The Criterion* 2/8 in July 1924, available at www.cavafy.com. Ithaki was written in 1911.

to wend your way to many Egyptian cities,
to learn and yet to learn from the wise.

Ever keep Ithaca in your mind,
your return thither is your goal.
But do not hasten at all your voyage,
better that it last for many years;
And full of years at length you anchor at your isle
rich with all that you gained on the way;
do not expect Ithaca to give you riches.

Ithaca gave you your fair voyage.
Without her you would not have ventured on the way.
But she has no more to give you.

And if you find Ithaca a poor place,
she has not mocked you.
You have become so wise, so full of experience
that you should understand already what
these Ithacas mean.

Kavafis (1863-1933) uses the story of Odysseus, who needed 10 years to return to his home in Ithaki from Troia, as a metaphor for our lives. He presents a *more distant end* (e.g. success, happiness, prosperity) as Ithaki island and our actions to achieve it (*intermediate ends, means*) as a voyage toward Ithaki. The central message is that an individual should not concentrate too much on his *more distant end*, because he will lose the opportunity to enjoy the actions he takes in order to achieve *intermediate ends* (*Means*). Kavafis, like Mises, considers an action both as a *means* in order to achieve a *more distant end* and as an *end*.

1. Means and End, Cause and Effect

If individual I_1

1. Chooses a certain end E_1 and puts aside other ends $E_2, E_3, \dots, E_n$ that he considers he could choose instead of the end E_1 , and
2. He chooses, among the means $M_1, M_2, M_3, \dots, M_n$ which he considers will enable him to attain his chosen end, the means

M_1 which he prefers and puts aside the other means $M_2, M_3, \dots, M_n$ that he considers he could choose instead of the means M_1 (The Axiom of Human Action)

then he would act M_1 in order to achieve E_1 , because he considers M_1 to be a cause of the effect E_1 . However, M_1 may cause other effects $F_1, F_2, F_3, \dots, F_n$ as well.

Kavafis states that the voyage (cause, means M_1) will cause

- the effect reaching Ithaki (effect, end E_1),
- the effect adventures (effect F_1)
- the effect knowledge (effect F_2)
- the effect visiting new places (effect F_3)
- the effect tough times (effect F_4) (Laestrygonians and Cyclopes)
- the effect pleasure (effect F_5)
- the effect joy (effect F_6)
-
- the effect F_n

Therefore, from all effects only one is chosen as an end.

2. Means, End, Cause, Effect and Time

Above I said that if an individual I_1 acts M_1 the effects will be $E_1, F_1, F_2, F_3, \dots, F_n$. If, however, he could reach his *End* E_1 instantly he wouldn't be able to experience the effects $F_1, F_2, F_3, \dots, F_n$.

Therefore, Kavafis said that an individual should hope his voyage (*Means* M_1 in order to achieve a *more distant end* E_1) to be a long one, because the longer the voyage the more effects $F_1, F_2, F_3, \dots, F_n$ will be caused by M_1 . His advice to the acting individual is to enjoy those effects, e.g. to consider them *ends*.

Even if an acting individual faces a lot of difficulties and disappointments (Laestrygonians and Cyclopes) when he tries to achieve a *more distant end*, he should not try to reach his *more distant end* as quickly as possible in order to avoid those tough times, because tough times are a valuable experience (an *End*), something which an individual can benefit from.

Nevertheless, an individual should never forget his *more distant end*. This is what gives meaning to each of his actions (*means and end*) However, once he has attained his *more distant end*, he will realise that this is only «a part of the value». He will then understand what Ithacas (*more distant ends*) mean.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

- KAVAFIS, C.P., *Ιθάκη* in *Ποιήματα 1897-1933*, *Ίκαρος* 1984 translated by George Valassopoulos and published as *Ithaca* in *The Criterion* 2/8 in July 1924, available at www.cavafy.com.
- MISES, Ludwig von, (1966 [1949]): *Human Action*, San Francisco: Fox & Wilkes, Fourth Revised Edition.
- (2002 [1962]): *The Ultimate Foundation of Economic Science*, New York: Foundation for Economic Education.
- (2007 [1957]): *Theory and History*, Alabama: Ludwig von Mises Institute.