

In a World Where Primacy is Given to Maximizing Profit, Mistrust Is Bound to Become Ubiquitous

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The Value of Values: Trust

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On July 20, 2011, Ireland's prime minister accused the Vatican of downplaying the rape and torture of Irish children by clerical sex abusers.¹ Kamran Mofid wrote (July 24, 2011, in a personal communication):

I have read these articles [²] with great sadness. I suppose it saddens anybody who wishes to believe in the wisdom, beauty and relevance of religion/Catholicism to everyday life. Very sad indeed. Who may have we trust in today? The politicians, the bankers, the media, the press, the police, the judges, the priest,...? Who? The teacher, the lecturer, the professor, the doctor, the surgeon, the dentist, the drug companies, the food suppliers and manufacturers, the car mechanic, the builder...? Why have we turned our world so untrustworthy and for what reason, and can we find happiness, joy and peace when we can trust nobody?

Indeed, what an important question: Who may we have trust in today?

Who is my doctor working for? Do I really need this medical treatment or drug, and is it really safe? How can I be sure that he does not put profit first? Why are baby bottles toxic?³ Why are baby food advertisements so misleading?⁴ Why do psychiatrists on drug makers' payrolls promote bipolar disorder in young children, a condition that was once thought to affect only adults and adolescents?⁵ Why does nobody question the "medical community's enthusiasm for pathologizing entirely natural emotional responses to (among other things) humiliating experiences"?⁶ The list is much much longer.

In a setting that gives primacy to profit maximization, mistrust is called for, systemically. A culture that gives primacy to maximizing profit undermines ethical behavior.⁷ It erodes the very reason for trust. And it does this systemically.

Yet, living in a world that forces mistrust upon its citizens by design, is an inhumane and humiliating world. It is destructive, not least since social trust is directly linked to health.⁸ Research shows that as the Western world has become wealthier, instances of clinical or major depression have grown.⁹ This suggests that a culture of ruthless individualism, where everybody races for maximum profit, brings more than what Forrester calls "economic horror."¹⁰ It is an ultimate irony that the pharmaceutical industry maximizes profit by feeding on the damages that flow from a culture that gives priority to maximizing profit. Indignity and humiliation is compounded by bandages that

deepen it. “The Illusions of Psychiatry,” is the title of a review of a number of related books.¹¹

How could such a rat race culture emerge? Author Philip Delve Broughton wrote a book about his two years at Harvard Business School:

In 1968, the *Harvard Business Review* published an article by Albert Z. Carr titled “Is Business Bluffing Ethical?”¹² It generated a slew of critical letters. Carr compared business to poker, in which bluffing, short of outright cheating, was a perfectly legitimate activity. He said that many successful businesspeople lived by one set of ethical standards in their private lives and a quite different set in their professional lives. The explanation, he said, was that they perceived business not as an arena for the peacock-like displays of high ethical standards, but as a game with specific rules. Knowing that you could win the game of business playing all manner of tricks that you would never inflict on your spouse, children, or friends made for a calm, unstressed, uncomplicated life. But to some, it seemed to be an acknowledgment that business was fundamentally unethical.¹³

During the past decades, a culture of cynicism was not just the preserve of business schools only in the United States. Lying and bluffing were increasingly regarded as “just a game” in many parts of the world, legitimized by the fact that all knew it was being played. As a result *just world thinking* (the belief that winners deserve to win and losers, to lose)¹⁴ and *blaming the victim*¹⁵ became rife and those who did not lie and bluff were simply disparaged as dim-witted.¹⁶

In postmodern America and Britain, writes physicist Jeff Schmidt in *Disciplined Minds*,¹⁷ a new class of Americanized managers was bred, “to run the private and public sectors: the banks, the main parties, corporations, the BBC.”¹⁸

Professionals are said to be meritorious and non-ideological. Yet, in spite of their education, writes Schmidt, they think less independently than non-professionals. They use corporate jargon—“model,” “performance,” “targets,” “strategic oversight.” In *Disciplined Minds*, Schmidt argues that what makes the modern professional is not technical knowledge but “ideological discipline.” Those in higher education and the media do “political work” but in a way that is not seen as political.¹⁹

Author and activist Raj Patel joins this discussion with his book, *The Value of Nothing: How to Reshape Market Society and Redefine Democracy*.²⁰ “We’ve come to believe that the only way we can value things is by sticking them in a market,” Patel says. “The trouble is, as we’ve seen through this recession, that markets are a tremendously bad way of valuing things, tremendously fickle.”²¹

Indeed, “sticking things in a market” has been a strong thrust throughout that past decades. James Murdoch, son of global media baron Rupert Murdoch, “in a lecture to the Edinburgh Television Festival in 2009, whilst attacking the publicly-owned BBC, declared that ‘the only guarantee of independence is profit.’”²²

Murdoch is right. If maximizing profit is given priority, this does lead to independence, however, only for a few, coupled with dependence for the rest. In a setting

of “freedom” by way of lack of regulations, profit compounds profit, and inequality ensues, trapping the majority in the power games of a few.

Richard G. Wilkinson, scholar of social epidemiology and expert in public health, and epidemiologist Kate Pickett show “why more equal societies almost always do better.”²³ Their conclusion is that “bigger income differences lead to bigger social distances up and down the status hierarchy, increasing feelings of superiority and inferiority and adding to status competition and insecurity. Some of the causal links are known: the effects of chronic stress on the immune and cardiovascular system are increasingly well understood and must underpin the relationship of income inequality to health. Similarly, the reason why violence increases in more unequal societies is because inequality makes status even more important and the most common triggers to violence are loss of face, disrespect, and humiliation.”²⁴

Wilkinson and Pickett write further:

Although people have often regarded inequality as divisive and socially corrosive, that did not prepare us for what we found. The frequency of all these problems was systematically related to income inequality. The bigger the income differences between rich and poor in each society, the worse these health and social problems became. And rather than things being just a bit worse in more unequal countries, they were very much worse. More unequal countries tended to have three times the level of violence, of infant mortality and mental illness; teenage birth rates were six times as high, and rates of imprisonment increased eight-fold.

The sense that inequality is divisive was shown by the fact that in more unequal countries, only about 15 percent of the population feel they can trust others, compared to around two-thirds in the more equal ones. That evidence was supported by relationships with social capital and levels of violence – all showing that inequality damages the social fabric of society.²⁵

Many argue that profit maximization and equality are not mutually exclusive, on the contrary. Since a wealthy person is able to do good and give to charity, she decreases inequality. Yet, headings such as “The Charitable-Giving Divide” point at a different reality: “For decades, surveys have shown that upper-income Americans don’t give away as much of their money as they might and are particularly undistinguished as givers when compared with the poor, who are strikingly generous. A number of other studies have shown that lower-income Americans give proportionally more of their incomes to charity than do upper-income Americans.”²⁶

John T. Cacioppo, Director of the University of Chicago Center for Cognitive and Social Neuroscience, found in his research that only people who feel socially isolated tend to behave in concord with the *Homo economicus* model of pure self-interest, while people who feel socially integrated, do not. People who feel socially integrated tend to forego pure self-interest when the common good is violated. “Altruistic punishment” is a term that signifies that “people are deriving personal pleasure from foregoing their rational self-interests and pursuing what is in the interest of the collective.”²⁷

In other words, the “two cornerstones of classic economic theory,” namely the assumptions that individuals are “rational decision makers” and that individuals have

“purely self-regarding preferences,” “fly in the face of most psychological theories, where individuals are depicted as characterized by bounded rationality if not also by bounded self-interests.”²⁸

In conclusion, economic theory builds on concepts of human nature that fit only those who, through a background of social isolation, fail to value and guard social cohesion. Current economic theory is hence misguided at best, or, at worst, it worsens social dissolution through rewarding behavior that exacerbates it. Social isolation and mistrust, in a malign spiral, are thus brought to the fore systemically.

How could we, as a human family, ever be duped into such misguided cultural scripts? How could we become victims of such manipulation? “Clearly, we need to overcome being duped into powerlessness and mayhem—no longer should we play the role of useful idiots but assume responsibility, as humankind as a whole.”²⁹

What is the solution? I suggest: We should start by being ashamed. “Human beings are intersubjective beings: we see ourselves as others see us, and we can feel either pride or shame when we look at ourselves with others’ eyes. Shame, guilt, and humility all have prosocial aspects.”³⁰ Shame is what keeps us within the limits of the social contract.³¹ Humble people recognize that there are limits. Shaming can work for the good of the larger society. “Corporations and governments are often ‘shamed’ into abiding by the promises of humility they made. They are asked if they are not ashamed of cutting down the trees that are the backbone of a healthy global climate, of destroying biodiversity, the very gene pool that may one day provide humankind with all the medicine it needs.”³²

In my book *Gender, Humiliation, and Global Security* I advocate *big love*. I suggest that we, as humankind, particularly those of us with the knowledge base and the resources to address our crises, are failing to meet our responsibilities. We fail big love. “It is laudable and wonderful to love our families and friends, but that is not enough. How can we speak of love and forget that even if we succeed in giving birth to children of love, these children may not find a world worth living in?”³³

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¹ See, for example, “Is this the end of Catholic Ireland?”, at www.newstatesman.com/blogs/nelson-jones/2011/07/ireland-vatican-church, or “Ireland squares up to the Vatican,” at www.independent.co.uk/opinion/commentators/joan-smith/joan-smith-ireland-squares-up-to-the-vatican-2319524.html.

² See above note.

³ Rachel L. Gibson (2007).

⁴ BBC News, at news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/health/7779438.stm, published December 14, 2008.

⁵ See, among others, Benedict Carey (2008), or Lisa Cosgrove et al. (2006) or Joel Paris (2008). I thank Eugenia Tsao for the last two references..

⁶ Eugenia Tsao, personal communication, July 3, 2009. See also note 74 earlier in this chapter.

⁷ See, among others, Richard P. Bentall (2009), Philip Cushman (1995) and Kenneth S. Pope (2007). I

thank Linda M. Hartling for these links.

⁸ Takeo Fujiwara and Ichiro Kawachi (2008). I thank Linda M. Hartling for making me aware of this seminal study.

⁹ Robert Lane (2001). According to the World Health Organization (WHO, www.who.int), major depression (i.e., severe depressed mood that is episodic in nature and recurs in 75–80 percent of cases) is now the leading cause of disability worldwide with a lifetime prevalence of 17 percent in the Western world, thus ranking fourth among the 10 leading causes of global disease burden. In addition, the WHO states that depression is the most common mental disorder leading to suicide and they project that, at its present rate of growth, depression will be the second leading contributor to global disease burden by 2020.

¹⁰ Viviane Forrester (1996). Quoted in Evelin Gerda Lindner (2010), p. 131.

¹¹ “The Illusions of Psychiatry,” by Marcia Angell, July 14, 2011, www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2011/jul/14/illusions-of-psychiatry/?utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=July+14+2011+issue&utm_content=July+14+2011+issue+CID_30e963840ef16c93f2ce73f81f161eff&utm_source=Email+marketing+software&utm_term=The+Illusions+of+Psychiatry. See Irving Kirsch (2009), Robert Whitaker (2010), Daniel J. Carlat (2011).

¹² Albert Z. Carr (1968).

¹³ Philip Delves Broughton (2008), p. 159.

¹⁴ See Lee D. Ross and John T. Jost (1999); and for later work Melvin J. Lerner (2003).

¹⁵ See, among others, Lee D. Ross and Andrew Ward (1996).

¹⁶ Jørn Bue Olsen wrote his doctoral thesis on the ethics in the telecommunication business in Norway, a country proud of its international peace work. Olsen found attitudes such as “i business er alt tillatt” (“in business, everything is allowed”). Ethics were seen as something to be thought of when all other “important things” had been taken care of. See Jørn Bue Olsen (2006).

¹⁷ Jeff Schmidt (2000).

¹⁸ “Brainwashing the Polite, Professional and British Way,” by John Pilger, *New Statesman* (UK), June 23, 2011, www.newstatesman.com/society/2011/06/professional-managers-pilger.

¹⁹ See above note.

²⁰ Raj Patel (2010).

²¹ Ulrich Spalthoff, personal communication, March 19, 2010: “Here I make a distinction between individual values, which cannot be found by the market method, and social values which must emerge somehow from a chaos of competing and controversial individual values. For me, the market method (in somehow idealistic view, I admit) is the way to bring democracy into the economy. Or: Social values must compete on a marketplace. They cannot be defined from the ground up, like one can do with one’s personal values based on rigid ethical motives. That is why I am not skeptical against letting a market define the value of something. Of course, the value found this way may not be in line with my personal preference. This is unavoidable and its ok.”

²² Kamran Mofid, in a personal communication, July 14, 2011.

²³ Richard G. Wilkinson and Kate Pickett (2009).

²⁴ onpoint.wbur.org/2011/01/27/inequality-societies#.

²⁵ onpoint.wbur.org/2011/01/27/inequality-societies#.

²⁶ “The Charitable-Giving Divide,” *The New York Times*, by Judit Warner, August 20, 2010, www.nytimes.com/2010/08/22/magazine/22FOB-wwln-t.html.

²⁷ See psychology.uchicago.edu/people/faculty/cacioppo/index.shtml, and John T. Cacioppo and William Patrick (2008). I thank Linda Hartling for introducing me to Cacioppo’s work.

²⁸ See psychology.uchicago.edu/people/faculty/cacioppo/index.shtml.

²⁹ Evelin Gerda Lindner (2009), p. 126.

³⁰ Evelin Gerda Lindner (2006), p. 21.

³¹ John Braithwaite (1989).

³² Evelin Gerda Lindner (2006), p. 21.

³³ Evelin Gerda Lindner (2010), p. xxviii.