

## General Philosophy Briefly Stated

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Two among the world's problems that are road blocks preventing the solutions of many of the others are mass unemployment (to which can be added bad, low paying and precarious employment) and the deterioration of the delicate equilibria of the biosphere.

Nobody really knows how to solve them, and even less how to solve them without losing institutions that are already working reasonably well and without causing other problems just as bad or worse. But there are two principles I believe to be (in conjunction) likely to solve them, summed up by Gavin Andersson as unbounded organization, to which I add moral realism. They can also be called good will and structural understanding.

Good will simply mean that people want to solve them. They have pro-social attitudes. It means that society's collective intention, and the intention of the people who compose society, is to end unemployment and go green. More generically, it is to meet human needs in harmony with nature. Expressed in terms of honouring human rights that have already been agreed upon on paper but not implemented in practice (like housing, clean water, employment and so on), it means more mission-driven behaviour. It means purposeful lives and socially responsible institutions, as distinct from just seeking one's own self-interest; and as distinct from assuming that if anybody has a duty to make human rights real it is the people who work for the government, not you or me.

A hypothesis I am considering is that having a pro social attitude should be and perhaps already is part of the definition of mental health. And part of the definition of a good education. Aristotle already defined education as essentially ethical: a well-educated person finds pleasure in virtue. A badly educated person finds pleasure in vice.

So, our main problems are half way to being solved, if we can identify and implement methodologies for learning pro-social values. These methodologies could include promoting mental health, practicing religion in its pro-social versions, and the *phronesis* that François develops. If everybody, or almost everybody, has a caring personality and is committed to honouring human rights, then we are well on our way to including the excluded and to adjusting our personal lifestyles to what physics, chemistry and biology tell us must be done if life on this planet (which may be the only planet in the cosmos that has life) is to continue.

Historically, many, most or perhaps nearly all such virtue-forming and good-will-forming methodologies have been spiritual practices. The biologist David Wilson (*Darwin's Cathedral*) defines spirituality as practices that create virtue. In the present and future, psychology and

education may accomplish virtue forming (i.e. good habit forming) moral education with methods that would not accurately be labelled 'spiritual.'

The second half of the path to solutions to mass unemployment, loss of an environment capable of supporting life, and other crucial wicked problems (like the land and race issues in South Africa) is structural understanding. If people understand *why* mass unemployment persists, and *why* growth incompatible with sustainability has become an economic imperative, and if there is enough good will, then people are likely to defuse and disarm the causes of these problems. The answers to 'why' questions generally refer to structures (molecules, cells etc. in the natural sciences; rules and roles in the social sciences) A structural approach could also be called post-colonial and historical. It is post-colonial because it recognizes that humans have created many cultures with many different social structures. There is nothing eternal or inherently superior about the modern western structures that were imposed on the rest of the world by colonialism. It is historical because it understands that dysfunctional institutions (i.e. structures) as well as functional institutions are products of history. For the most part they were not created by anyone now living.

People will share their surplus (as the great religions have prescribed for centuries) to fund dignified solutions for the unemployed that do not depend on sales in markets when they understand that it is structurally impossible for revenue from sales of products to fund the employment of everyone who needs a job at good wages. Sharing will be a consequence of understanding plus good will, if enough of both exist. This is the case with voluntary mission-driven behaviour, and also the case with not entirely voluntarily but dutifully obeying laws one would prefer not to obey, such as laws that require the payment of taxes.

Ecologically unsustainable growth will cease to be an economic imperative when structural understanding shows that alternatives are available. A plural economy can (and already to some extent does) tap a variety of motives to get the work of the world done. More than now, constructive activities providing income and dignity (like planting trees, music, art, sports and science...) will be funded from transfers of surplus. This is especially true considering the huge surpluses generated by the Microsoft and Facebook technologies (the Gates and Zuckerberg fortunes) and other fortunes that will be generated by other breakthrough technologies, many of which are already in the pipeline.

It should also be taken into account (as I observe in Chile) that poor people generally need only fairly small transfer payments because they can usually meet most of their needs in other ways (like taking care of each other when sick, precarious employment of several household members helping to support stable domestic units, building their own and each other's houses, gardening, mini-businesses ...) Asset-based community development and neighbourhood organization achieve goals that large-scale capital investments do not achieve. Indeed, for satisfying needs for identity, love and self-esteem, large scale capital investments are non-starters.

Structural understanding also shows how to get out of a vicious circle humanity is now in and into a virtuous circle. The vicious circle is that every time the economy lags (and in SA and many other countries it always lags) by creating too few jobs and leaving too many people stranded with no incomes, the policy response is to provide more profit incentives for profit driven large scale investors. The vicious circle result is that the lives of the people become even more physically dependent on profit-motivated decisions of large-scale investors than they already were; requiring an even larger dose of even more anti-social incentives the next time around.

Taking positive actions in the light of structural understanding can in principle start a virtuous circle. Mission-driven creation of shared value led by authentic leadership at the level of large organizations, combined with greater self-reliance and resilience at the level of poor neighbourhoods, can mean that next time around crises can be addressed with more (intelligently organized, virtue-building not vice-building) transfers from those who have more than we need to those who have less than they need, and less or zero injections of large scale private capital investment. Tilting the sharing of revenue from sales even more in favour of capital and even less in favour of labour than it is already tilted can progressively cease to be the only game in town. Pro-capital tilting to 'jump start the economy' in any case invariably fails to deliver the social benefits that orthodox (positivistic, non-structural) economic theory promises. The structural causes that doom jump-starting with new investment and/or deficit spending and tax cuts to failure include capital flight, the threat of capital flight, relocation of industry in search of lower wages (the locational revolution studied by Jeffrey Winters), the chronic insufficiency of effective demand, and the fiscal crisis of the state (too many expenses with income structurally limited mainly to taxation while taxation is limited by tax competition to attract investment).

A structurally informed moderate approach does not mean giving up on equality as an ideal or giving up on the ideal of bringing down today's extreme inequality. It does mean seeing the structural feasibility of serving the more down-to-earth ideals of making sure everybody can live in dignity and comfort in harmony with nature by taking doable and relatively uncontroversial steps. Moreover, doable steps that organize and empower neighbourhoods, cooperatives, workers and mini-entrepreneurs increase –they do not decrease—the prospects for making progress on more general and abstract ideals like equality of opportunity. They are steps toward, not away from bringing down inequality to levels advocated by philosophers like Philippe Van Parijs and John Rawls (i.e. only inequalities that provide incentives for behaviour that benefits everyone).

Another point realism must consider is that some of us believe that the earth's human population has to stabilize or come down. We have no airtight proof that the ecological optimists are wrong. Maybe – even though we not believe it— population growth can go on forever without limit. However, we do have an answer to those who say we need to keep increasing the human population because population growth is necessary for economic growth or for having a large enough working population to support paying the pensions of the retired

population. The answer is that when ecology clashes with the economy, it is the economy that should change.

Structural understanding saves us from blaming people now alive for our problems. The main cause of extreme inequality and mass unemployment is not greed. It is the rules of the economic game sometimes summarized as ‘the market.’ The growth imperative that dooms the environment is also a result of the historical evolution of social structures. It is not the result of anybody’s deliberate plan to destroy life on planet earth. The economy works the way it works because history gave it the structure it has.

Marx makes the point that structures dominate and overrule human intentions. In the preface to the first edition of *Capital* he writes that it does no good for capitalists like his friend Friedrich Engels to have good intentions. The structures (*Verhältnisse*) force capitalists to do what they have to do in order to compete in markets. What they have to do is exploit workers. Marx’s observation does not necessarily lead to drastic conclusions. His observation also suggests a general principle for a moderate public policy that is followed by the present centre-right Chilean government and was followed by its centre-left socialist predecessor. The policy is public private cooperation. It is working with capitalists and wealth-holders who voluntarily contribute to solving social and ecological problems. Structural understanding sees the need (and therefore the ethical duty) for the sharing of wealth. It leaves open different ways to achieve it. One way to achieve it is through public policies that compensate for the phenomenon noticed by Marx: namely capitalists with good will who share wealth, e.g. raising wages, funding schools, being punished for their virtues by the social structures. (Of course, as Plato was among the first to see, there is no way to see inside people’s souls to see whether professed good will is sincere; but, on the other hand, as modern psychology teaches, there is nothing to be gained and much to be lost by assuming *a priori* that human nature is such that all good will is a sham.)

An approach that sees root causes in structures, more than in people or classes of people, does not mean dropping ideas like Thomas Piketty’s to raise taxes on inheritance, wealth, and high incomes, in order to fund dignity for those now excluded. It does not mean dropping the promotion of cooperatives, local economic development, and/or the public sector. On the other hand, it also does not mean ignoring research that favours liberal policies, such as Gary Becker’s findings that public officials who are supposed to be serving the public interest often in fact serve their own private interests. It means complementing relatively moderate structure-changing actions with relatively drastic structure-changing actions in some appropriate mix. And doing so with caution, pluralism, creativity, education, research, learning from prototypes and pilots before going to scale, and so on.

My general second point is that libraries full of positivist research charting patterns found in observed data are not showing humanity how to solve its problems. They show observed patterns that require explanations; they do not explain them. It is no excuse that really existing socialism in either its centrally planned versions or its social democratic versions did not work

(<http://unboundedorganization.org/the-swedish-model-as-programmed-for-failure/>). Nor can we conclude from neoliberalism not working either that the verdict of science is that nothing works. A more constructive approach holds, first, that pro- social attitudes that motivate caring for others and commitment to human rights get us half way to solutions. Second, to get the other half of the way toward mending the social fabric and saving the planet; a more constructive approach recommends using realist science to analyse the causal powers of the natural and social structures that produce the road block problems, and to work with stakeholders in designing solutions.

Peace and all good,

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**THANK YOU!**