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CHAPTER 6

Vanishing Meaning, the Ideology of Value-Addition, and the Diffusion of Broadband Information Technology

Eric Mark Kramer

Three confidential documents from inside the World Trade Organization Secretariat and a group of captains of London finance, who call themselves the "British Invisibles," reveal the extraordinary secret entanglement of industry with government in designing European and American proposals for radical pro-business changes in WTO rules.

—Greg Palast, November 9, 2001

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I attempt to describe just what it is that is being "globalized." Literature discussing globalization too often skirts or even fails to address what it is that is spreading other than some platitudes about development, prosperity, and/or democracy. In the course of my attempt to identify what is spreading, I explore two fundamental economic concepts promoted by the faithful followers of David Ricardo and his theory of rent and labor theory of value: more specifically the concepts of comparative advantage and value-addition. What is argued below is that because of the epistemic and ideological centrism essential to economics as a "pure science," neither of these concepts takes into account actual (which is to say existential as opposed to virtual) cultural and/or linguistic variance except in terms of how, as extraneous factors, they obstruct capital formation. Yet these economic principles themselves presuppose a cultural perspective which promulgates a cosmology that presents the universe as increasingly dead and empty and which reduces all, including human beings, to variables within absolutist calculations.

INTRODUCTORY OBSERVATIONS

In 1995, Boris Yeltsin's children were found guilty of holding Swiss bank accounts containing huge sums of money. How was this possible? "Kickbacks" that were partly used for their father's reelection campaign. But kickbacks for what? The new Russian democracy had been corrupted from the start but by who and why? The U.S. Treasury and the World Bank had demanded as its first step in a four-step assistance program that Russia privatize its industries. The United States also wanted Yeltsin to win reelection. Routinely, national leaders who oversee the selling-off of their own nation's assets get 10 percent commission paid directly into Swiss bank accounts. Ten percent of billions of dollars is quite a bribe. At least that is how the World Bank's former Senior Vice President and Nobel Prize winning Chief Economist, Joseph Stiglitz, describes it.¹ The U.S. Treasury holds 51 percent ownership in the World Bank. Stiglitz calls "step one" in the World Bank's standard "Country Assistance Strategy," not privatization but "briberization." In 1999, the U.S. Treasury Secretary, Larry Summers insisted on Stiglitz's termination.

In 1998, when the International Monetary Fund (IMF) eliminated food and fuel subsidies for the poor in Indonesia the nation exploded into riots. In 2000, riots over water prices erupted in Bolivia. In 2001, sanctions imposed by the World Bank on Ecuador forced steep rises in cooking gas prices setting off widespread "social unrest." Such "unrest" is fully expected and planned for by the IMF/World Bank. In their "Interim Country Assistance Strategy," the bankers fully recognize that their plans for reforming economies are expected to spark widespread "disturbances," which they say must be faced with "political resolve." That was the guidance offered to Ecuador when the World Bank made the U.S. dollar Ecuador's currency, a move that in one fell swoop forced 51 percent of the population below the poverty line. At the end of 2001, in Buenos Aires, two dozen Argentines were gunned down by police, "after they chose to face bullets rather than starvation."² Under the guidance of the International Monetary Fund the Argentine currency had collapsed while unemployment and interest rates had soared beyond measurement for the former (the last reasonably accurate measure of unemployment was 16 percent) and to 90 percent for the latter. Such "social strife" predictably causes capital to flee and governments to become insolvent. This situation allows for foreign investors and corporations to move in and cherry pick the carcass of remaining assets at fire sale prices.

After step one in the standard "restructuring agreement," which the World Bank offers to "begging" finance ministers of poor countries for "voluntary" signature, comes step two. Step two is "capital market liberalization." This means that the nation's capital market is deregulated. In theory, this will allow investments to flow into a nation. But, in the

cases of Indonesia and Brazil, an orgy of capital flight was initiated. Under total deregulation, a nation's reserves can evaporate literally in a matter of hours, in large part thanks to broadband bank transactions. Stiglitz calls this the "hot money" cycle by which he means that after the initial capital flight and resultant interest hikes, the capital that does then flow in is for quick speculation in the collapsed real estate and currency markets. In order to seduce speculators to return some of the original flight money, the IMF usually demands that nations raise their interest rates by as much as 80 percent, a move which triggers a collapse in local property values, industrial production, and which puts tremendous stress on the financial sector. Such inflow capital is not motivated for long-term development of the nation's assets. Rather it is purely speculative and opportunistic in the short term. This predatory capital is poised to leave at any hint of trouble. These kinds of conditions encourage massive profit taking, no investment, and it can strip out the value of a country in just days. This hot money cycle has been witnessed in Eastern Europe, Asia, and Latin America in the last decade. In many ways, these operating procedures evolved and were refined through efforts of Western interests to maximize advantage immediately after the fall of the Soviet system. This step and the ones that are discussed below are the lessons of political-economic conquest.

Following step two comes step three of the restructuring agreement. After demolishing the local economy with step one, privatization, and step two, deregulation and interest hikes, the IMF/World Bank imposes step three called "market-based pricing." In every case, market-based pricing has resulted in tremendous inflation as commodities are floated with the effect of pauperizing a vast majority of the population. The austere "shock treatment" is, as the market logic dictates, the only way to go. Thus, huge price spikes for food, water, and petroleum products such as cooking gas occur. This is when the riots start and violent repression commences. Strikes are criminalized, universities closed, the mass media controlled, groups dispersed, curfews imposed, troublemakers detained or worse. Today, post-9/11, troublemakers can be labeled terrorist enemies of the state—a spectacular irony if ever there was one. Once order is imposed, then the real systematic, "legitimate" exploitation can commence.

Step four is the "poverty reduction strategy," otherwise known as free trade. A particular version of free trade is imposed by the World Trade Organization and World Bank. The rules of the WTO and World Bank's version of free trade constitute a situation that Stiglitz says is reminiscent of the imposed relationship between China and its suitors during the Opium Wars when China, perceived as nothing but a market, was forced open (in other words, economically raped). Resistance to this step is met with a financial "blockade." Financial aid is linked to many conditions that are interlocked so that if one is not met, this failure to comply "triggers" all the others.

Accepting a World Bank or IMF loan for a hospital or school triggers a requirement to submit to every “conditionality” in the contract. According to “secret” World Bank documents acquired and quoted by the BBC, the average number of conditionalities per country is 111.³ Stiglitz argues that such “poverty reduction programs” undermine democracy. The results have been dismal. For instance, under the guidance of the IMF, Black Africa’s level of productivity has plummeted and due to the WTO’s (Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights) policies concerning intellectual property rights, pharmaceutical companies have priced the formulas for their branded medicines out of the reach of billions, in essence condemning them to death.

Why was Stiglitz fired? Because he determined that these policies were spreading misery at least as much, if not more, than democracy and shared prosperity. His solution, which was considered outrageously radical, was to attack the propertied oligarchies that exist throughout the world through land reform. But of course landlordism is the basis of the power that elites around the world enjoy, elites who benefit from the very policies Stiglitz rejected; elites who control the WTO, IMF, and World Bank.

Every time the four-step free market solutions have been imposed, they have led to disaster. And in its absolutist stance, each time the solution to the disaster is the same. Each time the IMF has demanded yet more free market policies to fix the mess market “liberalization” has caused. Once the role of government is redefined and its protections for the poor eliminated, there is a feeding frenzy among the rich and powerful. The econometric “absolutist” approach fails to recognize what’s actually happening “in the streets.” Stiglitz likens this one-track econometric mindset to medieval bloodletting. If the patient dies that only proves that “he still had a little blood left in him.”⁴

THE IRRATIONAL EQUATION OF WEALTH WITH RATIONALITY

Make no mistake, the prestige class is just as much an activist for the expansion of their power as the “rabble in the streets” protesting globalism. Only the “rabble” do not have seats in the luxurious suites where policy deals are hammered out in muted tones with soft footfalls on plush carpets signaling the attention of those who constantly wait (in the margins) with refreshments for the participants. The only difference is one of power. The privileged have the same DNA as those who are underprivileged. And the privileged “protest” just as much, only they are much more likely to get their way. The difference between the rich and the poor, who are overwhelmingly “working poor,” is their discursive comportment, their available ways of discussing the future.

Elites mask their intense and relentless drive for domination with privacy—secrecy. As the occasional peek afforded by sources such as the Nixon tapes demonstrate, the privileged and powerful discuss their interests and the shape of the future in what are often less polite terms than the poor, only they do so behind closed doors.

Behind the facade of gentility, the talk is no more “cultured” than that of the poor in the streets. The major difference is that the poor do not have the luxury of a backstage to retreat to and hide. The poor, strikers, protestors, and other relatively powerless groups who man the barricades and megaphones, who confront the police lines, must use what is left of public space as so circumscribed by brute power. So they show up in the mass media appearing more uncouth, irrational, chaotic, confrontational, disrespectful, and ignorant than the rich. The rich are seen in rational poses, meeting, discussing, and disembarking from an impressive queue of limousines. They look important, smart, and serious: in a word legitimately authoritative. They carry briefcases, are accompanied by an entourage of administrative assistants and professional bodyguards. Meanwhile the poor have no bodyguards. They are their own often spontaneous and hodgepodge entourage and support group. They walk to the line that separates them from the limousines and meetings. They push to get in while the elite never push to get out, for the “down and out” constitute the irrational and ignorant mob while the “up and in” constitute the expertise of administrative reason. While mob membership is anonymous, those in the meetings often know each other well, even having attended the same business schools.

However, the rich in the five star hotels are no less irrational, ferocious, resolute, or childish than the poor in the streets. But they can afford a backstage and a backdrop that is protected by strict contracts enforcing silence among their employees and space guarded by armed mercenaries and police who form the boundary between their central authority and all Others. While the poor are constantly monitored by hidden cameras, motion detectors, and other private eyes of public space, the rich recluse into spaces they totally control, especially in terms of access. Indeed there is ample evidence that the rich, while appearing well groomed, self-contained, disciplined, and wise (all features of control), are less understanding of the typical human experience than the poor are. Their segregationist behavior and the formation of identities and loyalties can often be traced to juvenile rituals in fraternities at various sorts of elite preparatory schools and private universities, adolescent loyalties that endure to form the cohesion of their “adult” political and business networks. Membership has its privileges and the typical in-group, out-group suspicions, distrust, and territoriality prevail. The meetings are *private* even as their purpose is the planning of public policy.

I want to deconstruct the often apparent but false difference between

highbrow culture and politics and lowbrow culture and politics, between the slick and the rough, the privileged and the not privileged as human beings and styles. Another difference to be critically examined is the dichotomy between expert knowledge of abstract economic "realities" formed of variable analytics and which elites use to justify actual inequalities and power formations, and the local knowledge of actual human beings. Such abstract justification is often used to confuse and at the same time impugn the motives and malign the intellect of the critics of the social, political, and economic conditions the imposition of austerity programs almost always create for the majority. Thus, elites claim that the poor just don't understand and if they did they would agree with the predominant ideology of the dominant class; they would be more willing to bear the austerity demanded by economic models in the name of mathematical logic. Accordingly, all protest or questioning is reduced to being either childish and irritatingly ignorant or an irrationally dangerous interpretation that "breeds anarchy." What Mikhail Bakhtin⁵ missed in his analyses is that the difference between the discourse of the poor and that of the rich is more a matter of affordable style, the overall ideology of imagery and communication (*obraz jazyka*), than a difference in the intensity of interests pursued.

The so-called disinterested calculations of econometrics manifest very clear interests, and they are aggressively defended and implemented. Quantification does not eliminate the need to choose what to quantify and why. Furthermore, quantitative approaches do not escape the "linguistic turn." Quite to the contrary, the quantitative researcher's insistence that if a thing cannot be expressed numerically it cannot be said to exist makes the case for the metaphysics of the linguistic turn. Absolute and singular dedication to operationalization expresses a total commitment to a chosen code system, the "language of mathematics." It is a level of commitment to linguisticity rarely matched by other means of expression. It is religiously intolerant of other codes, matched perhaps only by the insistence by some Muslim clerics that to translate the Quran from Arabic is to utterly defile the message. Mathematical scientists insist that if you cannot read mathematics you cannot understand their truths because they are virtually untranslatable. Number is all.

Language is both a means of communication and a great barrier to it. If a person does not speak a language, when they are confronted with it they are rendered deaf and mute. This is the case for the uninitiated when they are confronted with the econometric language-game of experts. It is formally absolutist, meaning that it rejects any existential dimension to reality, and it is a very effective barrier to communication about economic realities. It claims to be practically untranslatable. Economics also func-

tions as a retreat from engagement with "the rabble" because they can't understand anyway.

Styles of interacting, such as the decadent antics delighted in at various exclusive retreats such as the Bohemian Grove, expose the same sort of carnivalesque quality that is often assigned to the poor by the elite. From Roman times on, elite classes partake in (indeed entire cable television networks are now dedicated to celebrating) ostentatious consumption and the carnivalesque behavior of the "rich and famous" only in much more debauched and sumptuous ways and (and this is important), within more controlled, segregated surroundings. The cameras gain momentary entrée to a world the unwashed pay for with blood, sweat, and tears, but can never hope to enter (or they become delusional about entering).

It is false to claim that only the poor get drunk and act irresponsibly. It is false to claim that the "rabble," the janitor in one's office for instance, does not need to be listened to. But the dominant expert discourse argues that her voice is irrelevant because, after all, she is "just a janitor," and though she too must navigate this economy and political environment, pay her bills and raise her children, her opinions are just that, nothing more than uninformed opinion when compared with *real* economic knowledge. Typically in the social sciences, even anecdotes count if enough are collected and compiled. But in econometrics, even if an entire national population is rioting, they are still wrong, for econometrics does not survey the opinions of the masses. Rather, as a semihard science, it claims to calculate the truth from pure economic axioms and principles. Economic proclamations are axiomatic. In this way econometrics are quite antidemocratic and extremely abstract and unresponsive, which underscores its inability to reciprocate (communicate) with the very subjects it claims to explain.

Hence, a difference between the poor and the rich, the weak and the powerful, remains undeconstructed. It is that the powerful need not listen to the poor while the poor clamor for dialogue. The top-down communicator style of the powerful rejects Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of "responsive understanding." The only way to get the ear of the powerful is for the weak to organize and force negotiation; for the weak to become powerful. But the ideology of individualism has undercut this as workers vote to support "right to work" laws promoted to them by preachers in the pulpit, rightwing politicians, and the business community. The discourse of "freedom" as defined by the business community's control of the agenda is anathema to collective bargaining. In Orwellian style, dialogue is thus preemptively defined as an enemy to personal freedom. While nonsensical, this difference remains beyond easy deconstruction and it is a real difference of power. But there are yet more false differences, and dichotomies that can be reversed to reveal another aspect of reality.

SCIENTIFIC JUSTIFICATION FOR INEQUALITY

If there is a religion of the prestige class on a global scale today it is economics. And like all religions it is used to justify, from on high, all sorts of desires and wishes and to forgive all manners of inhumane behavior. No one is more thoroughly saturated with and devoted to their namesake principles than are capitalists. The key is imperative. Supernatural—natural law (for they are the same thing) is the most imperious dictator.

As “pure scientists,” economists allow for no existential dimension in their models. This means that economists believe that they are discovering natural laws that transcend and govern economic behavior. These laws are presumed to be absolute such that neither ethnology nor history nor personal experience have any bearing on either their existence or on economic behavior as so governed. As such, economics does not see itself as working with contingencies but instead with absolute formal relationships such as market logic. While models purport to explain and predict “economic behavior,” there are no subjects accounted for within the models to actually behave.

Virtual modeling presumes to come from no perspective, no person or persons, and to be completely indifferent to actual people while explaining and often justifying the dictates of their behavior. There are winners and losers in the economic world but such terms are merely metaphors of relative value, and nothing should be taken “personally.” Insofar as it claims to be “empirically based,” economics claims to be founded on experience but a curious species of experience, an experience without a subject. It has no class bias. But to have knowledge without a knower is of course impossible.

Thus we come to deconstruct the difference between local and universal knowledge, reversing the favor, tipping the balance toward the existentially based local. For the universal, generalized expertise is based on such crude averages that if applied to a landscape it would render it utterly flat. This is a crudity of knowing that is much more coarse and ignorant (for that is the result of ignoring details) than the local knowledge, needs, and demands of the so-called deluded “rabble.” Nothing is more delusional than insisting on seeing a flatland where valleys and mountains are plainly visible.

However, thanks to Thomas Kuhn and Edmund Husserl, both following Wilhelm Dilthey’s prodding, it has been demonstrated that *even* the “hard” “natural” sciences have histories, motives, and goals such as progress, growth, and happiness, and that highest of virtues, understanding. As Nietzsche points out, “the goal of science.—What? The ultimate goal of science is to create for man the greatest possible amount of pleasure and the least possible amount of pain? But suppose pleasure and pain are so linked together that he who *wants* to have the greatest possible amount

of the one *must* have the greatest possible amount of the other also.”⁶ The promise of science, its grand prejudice is to reduce all to mechanical causation so that it convinces everyone to accept fatalism, and the “*most stupid*” of all possible interpretations of the world, meaning that it would be one of the poorest in meaning . . . an essentially *meaningless* world . . . expressed in formulas: how absurd would such a ‘scientific’ estimation of music be . . . Nothing, really nothing of what is ‘music’ in it!”⁷ The same can be said of attempts to operationalize alienation, and of course value which otherwise is said to not exist. It is submitted here that the scientific denial of the existence of music or alienation simply because it cannot be measured is just as delusional as denying the hills and valleys and the people in the streets.

Proof that science is rooted in time and interests is demonstrated by the fact that the contents of science textbooks require updating more frequently than almost any other field of scholarship. And as a host of writers from C. Wright Mills to Jürgen Habermas have noted, grants and interests (corporate) increasingly direct the manufacturing of knowledge. Yet we are assured that progress toward an external, fixed, and extrahuman goal is being made daily and for the “greater good” even as it is objective and disinterested; beyond good and evil.

Economics too has a history. It too is valuable when it is exploited as a justification for the “order of things.” Ironically, however, “true” understandings and explanations of economic motives and behaviors have shifted across time, as schools of thought ebb and flow. But despite this observation, economists insist that they are referencing a coherent and changeless set of principles. The Marxian effort to identify various economic formations through time, that different historical phases present different labor formations, has been utterly rejected by the current establishment of economists.⁸ This author argues that just as the idea of history has changed through history and thus histories vary, the same is true of economics. Each era has its economic “truth,” but transcendent to this is the central fact that economics has to do with the distribution of resources and the power to control that distribution. Hence, economic reality always already has a political dimension: hence political-economy. The idea that “positive” economic science has no political dimension is fitfully naive.

THE MISSING “MEDIUM” OF ECONOMIC IMPERATIVES: THE BEHAVING SUBJECT

However, because economists see their science as having basically nothing to do with historical-cultural human beings, they ignore cultural and historical differences. This is because the science of economics itself is seen as being a discourse that more or less accurately describes a transcultural set of imperatives that act upon all cultures and societies equally. Accord-

ing to economists, economics presents truths that are ahistorical and this is seen as its greatest virtue rather than its greatest blindness. Likewise, actual goods or services that people produce are seen as merely contingencies within formulas. Therefore, specific knowledge of particular goods and services is regarded as unimportant. Consequently, it is widely believed that "management talent" can be plugged into any enterprise and make it work because all enterprises are presumed to function according to the same formal laws of economics. All are equal under the law. However, this faith has been shown to be misplaced as a lack of specific local knowledge has proven the downfall of "star" even "celebrity" managers moving into fields and enterprises they in fact do not understand. This is also highlighted as conglomerates diversify their holdings finding executives who cut their teeth on one kind of business suddenly mismanaging other kinds.

This is the point. According to economics all businesses are the same. Yet the business landscape is strewn with corporate fraud and huge debt as well as failed executives who learn how to manufacture automobile parts but then suddenly flounder in their efforts to manage racetracks, home furnishings, clothing lines, insurance lines, professional sports franchises, agricultural holdings, oil and gas exploration, military equipment manufacturing, and holdings in several countries and cultures.⁹ They "succeed" (which means expand) by leveraging current holdings to acquire more, thus living in perpetual and enormous debt.

This is why the mantra, grow or perish exists. Growth is not a good for its own sake. Small is not beautiful. Like everything else within the exploitable universe, growth serves an ulterior purpose, which is to acquire the Other or to block market entry of potential Others, thus eliminating competition. Capitalism is inherently imperialistic. And all Others are seen through this myopia as nothing but potential competition. Business is war. Thus, the psychology of capitalism and colonialistic modernity, not postmodernity, is chronic paranoia. National, industrial, and private spies are everywhere. Information (about Others) itself becomes a central commodity, central because it is essential to competitive advantage. Speed becomes of the essence and preemptive strikes become logical. That is the goal of blocking market access before the Other, the enemy, the competitor can get a foothold. In theory, market barriers are bad; competition is good. But in practice, blocking market access by means of giantism and patent and copyright laws is the rule. Imagine a traditional village where only one person is, by law, allowed to make pots or baskets. Engineered scarcity manipulates pricing. Money talks. Size matters.

In economics, the force of "market mechanisms" is presented as being transcendentally universal. Cultural, linguistic, and also service and product variances are simply conceptualized as factors that may hinder or enable capital formation not unlike the availability of petroleum or access

to deepwater ports. For instance, the fact that many in India are literate in English is held up as one variable among others, in this case as a competitive advantage to its potential rivals, China and Indonesia.

CAPITALIST MORALITY: THE GOOD OF UTILITY AND THE UTILITY OF THE GOOD

Despite what pure economics says, what counts as valuable is determined by the utility-perspective brought to bear. Thus, the most fundamental process of economics, the creation of value, is revealed to be dependent upon an interest, a perspective, not a universal, disinterested truth or mechanistic exchange (pure behaviorism). According to the notion of value addition, if I cannot make out of someone or something what I want, then it is essentially worthless. Here we have the emergence of the modern economic "good" as it corresponds to modern egocentrism and as it appears in goods and services, and as good *essentially*. The industrial, which is to say positivistic Spencerian sense of "good is essentially identical with the concept 'useful,' 'practical,' so that in the judgments 'good' and 'bad' mankind has summed up and sanctioned precisely its *unforgotten* and *unforgettable* experiences regarding what is useful-practical and what is harmful-impractical."¹⁰ Labor has no value until it is exchanged, until it is spent on production. All that matters are quantifiable ends, not means.

The morality of the so-called natural workings of economics and of the field (or fetish) of economic theory is: To be practical is to be exploitable, and to be exploitable is to have value, and to have value is good. To be unavailable for exchange, to be not for sale, to be beyond exploitation, is not merely to be worthless but to be (ironically) positively evil. It is, as Max Weber¹¹ argued, a very short step to the doctrine of a work ethic rooted in nothing less than Divine judgment. In such an industrial culture, "Idle hands are the devil's workshop."

THREE FALLACIES OF INNOCENT ECONOMICS

The demonstrable fact of economic interests raises the possibility of competing interests, which, in turn, plunges the concept of value into pure politics. Therefore, the "innocence" of pure economic conceptualization is exposed as a fallacy in three ways. First, the notion of value is dependent on interest. This is so because what is practical depends on perspective. Second, the notion of value is dependent on manipulation, which is goal oriented and as such, also perspectival. And third, the notion of value is always already political in nature. As there is no allowance for inherent value and as there is no recourse to an externally "real" value independent of subjective desire, which value predominates becomes a matter of a

struggle with and conquest over rival interpretations. Consequently, what is valuable is determined by the relative force of prevailing interpretation/discourse. As Nietzsche points out, "All things are subject to interpretation and whichever interpretation prevails at a given time is a function of power and not truth."¹² But this truth about interpretation is often lost in the resolute assertion that modern methods yield "independent" truths that one can be absolutely positive about.

A consequence of the hegemonic force of positive economic science is that workers are being convinced by this rhetoric. Due to a lack of confidence, of their swagger, they are no longer insisting on their right to participate in decision making. Somehow, the rhetoric of scientism has convinced them that they do not even necessarily deserve to share in profits. Throughout the United States, for instance, workers are willingly supporting "right to work" legislation in the belief that it is only logical that companies will not move into a community if they are forced to participate in collective bargaining. They are abandoning the moral-economic demand that we might call responsive understanding, or in Martin Buber's¹³ terms, authentic reciprocity among people who see each other as human beings. They falsely believe the promise that if companies do well, so too will their workers. As labor has been reduced to a thing, a market, it has become dissociated from the organic process of production. What was once indispensable to the manufacture of value, the worker, has become not exactly dispensable but interchangeable.

Today, the great false consciousness suffered by workers comes from a new religion that has arisen as a social science right in line with the Comtean call for a new priesthood of positive academics and industrial leaders. Many have been convinced that management decisions are not decisions at all but merely the reasonable conformity to imperatives imposed by the natural laws of economics. Management decisions are thus "realistic," adaptive, mimetic. As such, only a mad man would argue with natural truth that is understood best by economic experts who claim to be disinterested, impartial, and ironically value-free. Only a fool would seek to diverge from reality. And with the expansion of professional business schools, managers share experience with workers less and less. The perspectives of workers and managers are diverging more and more.

Contrary to the presumption that the "science" of economics is pure, which is to say objectively aperspectival, value is determined not by recourse to an objective reality with inherency but by means of will-power-drive manifested as rhetoric and material aggression. This is doubly absurd, for, while economics denies the inherency of value, as an *empirical* science it claims to be fundamentally referential to something external and independent to it. So then what exactly does economics measure when it measures value? It is decidedly not a natural phenomenon but instead the socio-cultural act of exchange.

Value addition is quite the opposite of a natural state of affairs. Rather, it is the imposition of human designs upon the world thus rendering it valuable. Prior to the cultural process of creating artifice, the world has no value. According to this ideology, a person has no value until they are transformed into a worker. They become an artifact. Value is the artifact *par excellence*. The world is there, but without exploitation, without being transformed into an artifice, it cannot be brought into the purview of economics, which is often equated with civilization itself. Thus, to be "gainfully employed," is a badge of civilized status.

According to instrumental logic, nothing has any value at all unless it can be added. The process of adding value means to extract and refine certain desired *qualities* as constituent processes of exploitation. According to economics, value exists only under the condition of exploitation. Thus, value is reduced to exploitation. If someone or something cannot be converted to serve an interest ("special" or not), in short, if someone or something cannot be objectified or rendered an artifice and as such utilized or exploited, then they and/or it have literally no measurable value.

CLIMBING THE LADDER: THE LOGIC OF REWARDS AND PUNISHMENT

Of all the social sciences, only economics warrants a noble prize because, presumably, it is the most positivistic of all endeavors to understand human behavior. The ethnocentrism of modern economists is complete. Only their culture, which to them does not exist for in their own minds they merely and objectively reflect a set of external positive truths, may exist. Any other culture is deemed to be a misanthropic set of parochial fallacies in need of final solution. As the true "positive man," the economist claims to have no point of view, no ego. He is a place where the known occurs without a knower, for perspective would spoil his immaculate perception. Such is the utterly bombastic delusion of economic science. Ironically, all other honest and less arrogant cultures are deemed worthless unless a way to exploit them, such as via tourism, can be arranged. Culture, for an economist, is at best a source of entertainment. Otherwise, culture is an epiphenomenon that must be eliminated, managed, ignored, or gotten around. Theory Z would suggest integrating some cultural practices (just enough to assure smooth production) into the production process itself, but not for the sake of cultural preservation but always for the sake of increased productivity. Because capitalism has no cultural allegiances, it is quite ready to exploit any and all kinds of people equally. But this is as far as equality goes. William Greider reminds us that all are the same only in that they are part of a pyramid of labor that is inherently unequal.

The history of industrial development has taught societies everywhere to think of the economic order as a ladder. Some people are high up on the ladder, others are struggling to climb it. The new dynamic of globalization plants a different metaphor in people's minds—a seesaw—in which some people fall in order that others may rise. Neither the ladder nor the seesaw is a satisfying metaphor since both excite explosive resentments and rivalries. Neither promises to lead to a global system that is both prosperous and stable, equitable and tolerant, since both rely inherently on exploiting the inequalities among peoples and societies.¹⁴

An example of liberal management's accommodation of cultural differences, the so-called multicultural workplace, is the accommodation of the daily prayers of Muslims in Indonesia by some "Enlightened" companies that supply prayer rooms on the factory floor to allow workers time to worship without leaving the assembly area. The owners do not necessarily share nor even care about the workers' faith. The point is to maximize productivity by entertaining (minimally) their parochial needs. Thus, culture is at best tolerated. And yet such tolerance or even integration of culture so as to improve the efficiency of exploitation is hailed as benevolent management practice. Such efforts are seen as "win, win," managerial genius. Give an inch in order to take a yard. Bend but do not break, this is the very definition of tolerance. Thus is the cunning of cultural management as taught to managers who govern multicultural workplaces. And so, work can become mobile. Jobs can be exported and imported like any other element of production.

While pure economic theory ignores culture and language as it traces the flow of capital, products, and services, cultural and linguistic differences form extremely difficult barriers for real workers. While capital and expert knowledge mobility continues to accelerate with the advent and diffusion of broadband telecommunications, workers cannot keep up even if they are willing to pack their bags and move. They are being forced to convert to the religion of corporate/global economic law at the threat of starvation. The ancient religious proclamation, "convert or die," remains clearly relevant. Today, death may not come by the sword but instead by slow irrelevance and literal starvation.

THE MISNOMER OF POST-COLONIALISM

Less "developed" countries, for development too is reduced to purely economic measures ignoring culture, are told by the World Bank and other powerful economic institutions that they will have "no future," unless they accept the values and practices of corporate capitalism. This is why, this author rejects the currently popular notion of "postcolonialism" for colonialism is alive and well, indeed it is demonstrably expanding faster now than ever, only now gunboats have been augmented by telecom-

munications. Rhetoric, the art of convincing, has become a powerful weapon in the arsenal not of democracy but of capitalism. Culture itself is the domain of struggle. Convert and "progress" or remain who you are and "stagnate." People are expected to "retool" not just in terms of production skills but also culturally and psychologically.

In old-style gunboat imperialism, indigenous peoples openly resisted because guns are actually less convincing than slick propaganda. With culture streaming in via broadband portals (computer monitors, television and cinema screens), there is no longer a "frontline" of conflict. Instead, such portals exist throughout the geographical domain of an indigenous culture, popping up like holes in Swiss cheese, making the boundary between cultures utterly permeable such that the concept of boundary is rendered irrelevant. The point of contact is now to be found at the interface between each television, computer, and cinema screen and viewers' retinas. Imperialism has become atomized and individuated. Thus, collective resistance and/or negotiation is short-circuited. Communities are undermined at the level of individual psyches, what Fredric Jameson calls the political unconscious.¹⁵ It has been demonstrated that people are most susceptible to persuasion when they are in a state of suspended disbelief.¹⁶ Thus, the dictum, "it's just television," is exposed as a naive apology for cultural imperialism. Classical imperialism was easy to recognize and resist. Telecolonialism, as I call it, is much more subtle and a matter of daily attrition.

Today, given the telecommunication ecology that is emerging within developing economies, culture clash happens at the interface of a mind with a computer or television screen. But it is less a clash than a seduction for interactivity gives the viewer a sense that they are in control while selecting which foreign message to attend to. Yet all are foreign not only in content, but more importantly, in form. Collectivism is thus displaced by personal communication with the foreign. The technology that enables this meeting is itself a seductive manifestation of the foreign and as such it embodies status conferral onto the owner. Thus, to achieve a personal computer overshadows the fact that having such a device exposes the owner to an endless stream of foreign images and sounds. The nature of the seduction is manifested as nothing less than "the future." Being "cutting-edge" in terms of consumer electronics is a manner of status pride. Such seduction of status conferral and status augmentation via consumption is expressly manifested by the fact that the purchase of personal computers, cellular phones, and television sets is not forced upon developing populations. Rather, given the social Darwinian ideology at work, the ability to own such technology first among one's peers itself constitutes development. This is the case on the personal as well as the national level. Development is, in fact, often measured in terms of teledensity (i.e., num-

bers of cell phones per 100,000) and the number of broadcast and cablecast channels available to a population.

BROADBAND AND THE BILTWELT (MANUFACTURED WORLD)

Culture itself is now engineered. The world has value only as a means to a world only envisioned. Culture too is reduced to a set of skills, behavior patterns, and attitudes that can either be gainfully utilized or rejected. Development has a direction. Action plans are submitted by experts. Increasingly we find indigenous peoples willingly *striving* to achieve personal information technologies so that they may have access to ever more cultural invasion. It is through such portals scattered throughout a cultural domain that consumer culture pours forth. These technologies are self-reinforcing. They manifest consumer culture, which presumes the philosophy of social Darwinism actualized as economic inequality and inequality of access to the newest, most seductively powerful personal IT. The convergence of technology with ideology was foreshadowed by many writers such as Raymond Williams, Harold Innis, and Alvin Gouldner (especially in his work *The Dialectic of Ideology and Technology*). But Lewis Mumford best articulated what is unfolding as technics and civilization converge into a holistic matrix or technological complex that he called "the machine." As IT has permeated the very core of culture and communication presenting its own criteria, imperatives, and language-game, it has thus become fetishized as an independent phenomenon available for positivistic reflection. Culture is increasingly something to be achieved through capital exchange, consumption rather than something that Heidegger would argue one is thrown into. As such, the technological complex (culture) has become not merely a tool but an identifier at the personal level and a savior. Information technology such as cellular phones and laptop computers constitute not just a means but an ends, and beyond this, a "necessity." Such enablers do not merely symbolize development as status markers, but they manifest it and also act as actual facilitators of further cultural imperialism. This is how IT is self-reinforcing, self-reproducing. Information technology is more than a tool. It implements and in so doing it creates dependencies.

The seduction that IT manifests exhibits certain qualities that parallel drug addiction. This involves the reciprocal loss of control expressed in the observation that power corrupts. Access to such technology gives people a sense of well-being, which they strive to reproduce and intensify. This is why people are endlessly striving (even plunging into personal debt) to purchase ever-greater computing power, ever more "memory," and ever-greater resolving power in picture processing, audio fidelity, and reckoning. Representational positivism is alive and well as consumers are

driven by the millions to achieve more realism. For instance, the ability to watch a friend or loved one via personal computer converted to video-phone from "the other side of the world" encourages what I call technophilia. To be a technophile means to fetishize and to romanticize and mystify the power of IT. Via basic psychological transference, to have access to and to "control" technology is to be more personally powerful. The power is real and so too is the personal identification with it and the seduction of it.

To be academically quaint we can say that such realities are measurable (thus making them real for social "scientists") as demand for broadband access is soaring in developing economies. Even (and ironically) national pride is often expressed in terms of levels of broadband penetration in countries like Singapore, New Zealand, and Korea. A measure of national maturity and "advancement" is how many PCs exist per capita and how many households have access to broadband infrastructure.

But such measures of development presume that happiness is, if not identical with such material achievements, highly correlated with them. For example, a report on economic development (the only kind there is allowed for these days) from the United Nations Development Program listed Nepal as ranking 143 out of 175 nations (with the U.S. ranked 6th). Nepal was consequently placed in the category "low human development" (the other two being "medium" and "high"). Its per capita income was measured at U.S.\$236.00/year. In response to this report unveiled in Dublin, July 8, 2003, the King of Nepal quipped during a speech to the United Nations, that although the United States may have a per capita income a thousand times greater than his countrymen in Nepal, he highly doubted that U.S. citizens are a thousand times happier. Such a claim strikes at the very heart, the very justification for positivism. In his own way Gyanendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev reiterates the Durkheimian discovery that depression and even suicide curiously occurs in greatest frequency among the materially richest populations. In short, material acquisition, including IT and the propaganda it purveys, may not be a savior after all. But that is its promise and seduction. However, economists do not recognize the existence of happiness and well-being even as they presume it as a justification for the need for economic development.

The idea that IT brings value to production and to life itself is ambiguous, if one is permitted to even broach the subject. Nothing seems more miserable than unsustainable development and unrealizable expectations. But that is the motto of positive development. One's reach should always exceed one's grasp. Frustration and the promotion of dissatisfaction is the goal of marketing. Without such nefarious values, the capitalist system cannot work. Satisfaction is the bane of industrialists. If demand and discontent do not exist, these bedfellows must be first and foremost manufactured. The manufacturing of discontent is the goal of marketing and

thus the portals of IT penetrate the sleepy backwaters of traditional societies stirring them up. Demand for products and services are the prerequisite for capital accumulation.

THE GLOBALIZATION OF THE LABOR MARKET

Furthermore, the Internet has given developed economies access to, indeed has created, a new massive labor pool that they did not have access to before. Also, capital and expert knowledge mobility is being greatly enhanced. People can now take ideas from "here" and match them with minds "there." All U.S. administrations have, at least since Kennedy, been pushing free trade and global integration without knowing that there is no basis to the theory especially with the free mobility of capital. While economists just now are talking about this, Marx wrote extensively about it. The international pool of laborers was the logical conclusion. Marx understood in the mid-1800s that capital has no nationality or allegiance, while labor cannot move nearly so easily. Laborers must not only move geographically but also across cultural and linguistic boundaries. Such crossings make them into "foreigners." While human foreigners are often not welcome, foreign capital always is. Foreign labor, be it Turks in Germany, Filipinos in Japan, Romanians in France, or Mexicans in the United States, is always at a financial and psychological disadvantage compared with indigenous workers. Globalization involves much more than just a question of global "integration" but the integration of values and socio-cultural systems. But this species of "integration" is actually a form of amalgamation. It involves not merely the adoption of world standards in economic and legal behavior, but also personal politics.

Cultures around the globe are under great pressure to converge and reduce variance. Human ecology is thus being pauperized, leading to the greatest extinction of languages and cultures in the history of the world. And this is occurring in the interest of corporatism. Communities are being incorporated, meaning that system theory is coming into its own by means of application from transcending, global powers. A corporation is a legal you, with rights, but a corporation is a moral it. This state of affairs is enabled by the dissociation of legality from morality. Now this ideology is being applied to ways of thinking and behaving not among business units but as an ethic among human beings. This is what is meant by becoming an incorporated human, with the stress being on the realization of the social Darwinian notion of functional fit.

As Marx noted, capitalism destroyed feudalism. Global amalgamation appears to be destroying not only organic cultures and linguistic communities, but the nation-state, bringing to an end the sacred ideal of modernity, national sovereignty, and with it nationalistically based identity. This is how the current trend is affecting personal politics. Such a shift

involves great political mutations and great dislocations at all "levels" of life. Many herald this dissolution as the end of national identity politics. In other words, capitalism is finally defeating parochial cultures that have a tendency to manifest as fascism whereby the individual self-identifies with a state apparatus. Party affiliations and other local identifiers are fading in the face of global imagery. A repositioning of the self is required.

However, a self-contradiction in the process is evident. When labor is pressed into military uniform, it is being used to stabilize and guard the expansion of globalizing markets such that soldiers are defending a process that is eliminating the very jobs they believe they are defending. The civilian work they hope to have waiting for them and their children at "home" is dispersing to cheaper markets under the protection they are themselves offering. While home may be seen from the halcyon heights of transcendental truths to be a mere contingency, a fiction born of perspectival distortion, to actual humans, it is still real and relevant, for they continue to live within space and time, within human, all too human, skins. But if taken to its logical conclusion, the new world order ends with the only labor remaining being soldiering, that is, the defense of the system itself. And this is of course what has been observed over and over again; that is to say, that the first function of a system or institution is self-perpetuation. And as we witness in the United States, soldiering is no longer a citizens' temporary duty to be served during moments of threat to national security, but soldiering has become a full-time and lifetime profession. The U.S. military has been converted into a permanent mercenary institution defending the private interests of global corporate capital. Threats to so-called national security are no longer sporadic, interspersed with long periods of peace when militaries can draw down, but have become permanent because not national, but corporate private interests have gone global. The old saying, "What is good for General Motors is good for America," by which is meant what is good for private corporate capital is good for its home nation, is no longer true. Now the nation-state apparatus has been reduced to a tool of global corporate private interests with only a facade of national obligation. Government is good for nothing except protecting transnational markets including the ebb and flow of goods, services, and capital, but not labor. Jobs, as functions within corporate flowcharts are easily transferred. But the actual workers are left behind in space/time.

THE FLEXIBLE WORKER IS GOOD

Cultures hinder labor mobility. Even though it was difficult, indeed often ruinous of families, in the past labor could follow capital within the borders of a country and for the same market. Men (typically) would migrate to find work and then send for their families. But today, the kind

of migration required is practically impossible. The "flexibility" demanded of workers is breaking down the traditional family. It is also practically beyond the capabilities of people. For today, in order to follow capital, workers must migrate not just great distances but across cultural and linguistic borders and also across divisions of labor expertise.

The much-vaunted division of labor, which is taken as a measure of how complex or developed a society has become, is now the trap of actual individual workers. Today it is common to claim that a worker will have to change professions several times in a lifetime in order to remain employable. Perpetual retraining and re-education is practically impossible. The stress of being overstretched is becoming a form of distress. Already, the ideology that education is the answer requires individuals to invest great sums of their own time and money into education and training in the hopes that their acquired skills and accreditation will mark them as being lucrative enough as exploitable labor commodity to be selected for employment. But regardless of one's commitment to "flexibility," to be willing to continually conform to changing labor needs, a person cannot easily move to China, if at all, especially with literally billions of workers already there.

Ricardo's notion of comparative advantage, which is the basis of free trade policy, was never rational from the point of view of labor. It always encourages a "race to the bottom" otherwise known as slavery. And given changes in world trade in the technotonic era, Ricardo's ideology, especially with regards to the labor market, makes even less sense (which Marx understood and explained). Most economists are irrational in their dedication to the Ricardian doctrine. Any suggestion that the theory of comparative advantage is illogical is immediately, in reactionary and automatic (unthinking) manner, attacked as "protectionist." Even leaders of countries, such as the president of the United States, are attacked for being too nationalistic and too protectionist of the country he or she leads if he or she suggests imposing measures to pressure trading partners to raise labor and environmental protections within their jurisdictions.

Indeed, the "pure" economist argues that there is no such thing as "foreign" markets but instead that there is only one single world market. In the last 20 years many have failed to see that economic theodicy has shifted from pantheism to monotheism. This Hegelian totalitarian systems view thus ghettoizes some pools of labor vis-à-vis others, denying any meaning to multiculturalism. Such a move sets up the notion of comparative advantage among automatons and within a single market system and it is manna to the ears of capital investors (exploiters). This amounts to the victory of atomism that Nietzsche so strongly argued against as the gateway to nihilism. Nihilism is the product of total uniformity.

The structure of economics that Ricardo presumed has changed largely due to changes in communication technology. The motive behind the IT

revolution is the formation of a single market system that can be managed under a single set of rules. In Ricardo's world, if labor was needed it was imported. This was slow and cumbersome. Also, as immigrant labor was imported it was typically paid at least the marginal value that pertained to that locale. And when processes of production began to be exported during classical colonial times, it was to sell the product where it was produced. Thus, when Germany or Japan built an automobile plant in the United States it was not to export the cars back to Germany or Japan, but to sell them in the United States.

Today, this has changed. Now production is exported to exploit demographic conditions around the world that present literally billions of people available for labor and what they produce is then exported back into the first world. These third-world laborers are not paid at least the marginal value within the market where their products are sold. Hence, profit margins are soaring.

The reason things have changed is because we can now, with new forms of communication that involve recording and transmission of information, erase spatial and temporal boundaries. However, from the point of view of real people, IT cannot erase cultural differences, though many are trying. Today, technical expertise can now be transferred at the speed of light. Also, the movement of concrete products has been greatly increased with the help of capital movement and stock tracking at the speed of light. Other technical developments, such as global positioning satellite navigation, have enhanced commodity transport. Today you can order a commodity from your personal computer and then track its movement from the factory to the primary transit point, through intermediate points of egress, right up until it arrives at your front door. White collar jobs are also now subject to foreign competition. Digitalization of information, new information data storage and transmission, and greatly increased bandwidth in China and India are changing the entire structure and shape of world markets. For instance, financial services have shifted overseas without any real time indicators. Increasingly when on the phone you can't tell where or who you are talking to about ordering goods and services including financial and customer services.

The new business model is giving rise to a new economic structure that is integrating two massive new labor pools into single world markets. And cultures, and the identities they have afforded for millennia, are becoming extinct. We are, as prophetic writers such as Jean Gebser, Mumford, and Karl Polanyi observed, in the midst of a "great transformation."¹⁷

NOTES

1. See a series of interviews with Joseph Stiglitz at the occasion of his winning the Nobel Prize in Economics conducted by Greg Palast for *The Observer*, 10 Oc-

tober 2001; Joseph Stiglitz, "The Globalizer Who Came in from the Cold," interviewed by Greg Palast, *The Observer*, Wednesday, 10 October 2001; Joseph Stiglitz, "IMF's Four Steps to Damnation," interviewed by Greg Palast, *The Observer*, Sunday, 29 April 2001; Joseph Stiglitz, *Globalization and It's Discontents* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001).

2. Greg Palast, "Eyes-Only Memos Show Who Done It," *The Observer*, Thursday, 7 February 2002.

3. Joseph Stiglitz, "The Globalizer Who Came in from the Cold," interviewed by Greg Palast, *The Observer*, Wednesday, 10 October 2001.

4. Ibid.

5. Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogical Imagination* (Austin, TX: University of Austin Press, 1981).

6. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* (New York: Random House, 1974), p. 85.

7. Ibid., pp. 335, 336.

8. Of course Marx made a similar mistake in that as a Hegelian he believed that history itself was governed by a phase-logic transcendent to and determining of actual historical conditions.

9. This diverse list of wholly owned and operated subsidiaries could be attributed to any number of conglomerates such as General Electric or General Motors, but for the record this very incomplete list is taken from Gulf + Western. Gulf + Western started in 1930 as the Michigan Bumper Company. In 1958, Charles Bluhdorn renamed it Gulf + Western and initiated its "conglomerate fever." In 1966 it acquired Paramount Pictures Corporation, in 1989 it changed its name to Paramount Communications, and in 1994 it was acquired by Viacom. Bluhdorn died of a heart attack on the company's private jet as he was returning to New York from the Dominican Republic, where Gulf + Western owned 8 percent of all the arable land. Political-economic luminaries such as Henry Kissinger attended his funeral. The complexity of interlocking directorates is enormous. In 1999, Viacom and Columbia Broadcasting Systems merged, a deal reported to be worth 80 billion dollars, bringing much of basic cable programming (MTV, Nickelodeon, VH1, BET, Paramount Pictures, Viacom Outdoor, Infinity, UPN, Spike TV, TV Land, CMT: Country Music Television, Comedy Central, Show Time, and so forth), on four continents together under one corporate umbrella with the most popular U.S. television network.

10. Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals* (New York: Random House, 1967), p. 27.

11. Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: Charles Scribner & Sons, 1958).

12. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power* (New York: Random House, 1967), p. 60 ff.

13. Martin Buber, *I and Thou* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1976).

14. William Greider, *One World, Ready or Not* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998), pp. 42-43.

15. Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1981).

16. Jay Blumler and Elihu Katz, *The Uses of Mass Communications: Current Perspectives on Gratifications Research* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1974).

17. Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1944).

CHAPTER 7

Universalized Globalization and the Logistics of Identity

Algis Mickunas

INTRODUCTION: MODERN UNIVERSALITY

It has been said that the modern West has engaged in colonialisms in the name of economic expansion, capitalist greed, and search for resources both human and material. Yet, various indications suggest that even Western European peoples were equally colonized by a set of metaphysical, ontological, and theological positions. The task of this section is to articulate those positions that comprise the conditions for understanding the universal globalization that would subject not only the others but also the globalizing peoples. This is to say, we want to decipher the underlying intentionalities, the ways of looking at the world that became regarded as universal, objective, and scientific. To form this logic, the modern philosophical-scientific arguments require the rejection of the experienced perceptual world as untrustworthy, qualitatively ambiguous, and therefore requiring strict rules as methodologies by which to interpret the "true reality."¹ Without going to the protracted arguments in the Arab world concerning the primacy of wholes over parts, we shall simply presuppose the modern assumption that any perceptual awareness has to be excluded from scientific and philosophical explanations in order to give a true account of reality beyond all senses. This is to say that sense awareness and its distinctions are to be excluded from scientific considerations. This means that human experience must be disregarded and its existence must be placed in an area that is scientifically irrelevant. This area is designated as subjective. What is left apart from this area is an objective method that demands certain features of the world to correspond to the objective

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