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Wrong Assumptions - Wrong Conclusions

The Atlantic Monthly recently carried an essay by economist Robert B. Reich called "The Real Economy," "Real" being printed in large letters so that the reader might understand that other analysts deal with an economy less than real. I bring it up to make again the point that some (most?) of our highly respected economic analysts are not worth listening to. They fail to take into account the most pressing of all realities: the ability of the planet to endure the human presence.

Reich's main point has to do with the power (I call it strangle hold) the global capitalist holds over the global economy and how Republicans and Democrats must adapt to that primary fact, that reality, if the United States is to be prosperous. Reich must be a very smart guy or he would not get such serious attention from intelligent (?) publishers. And I suppose the analysis presented in his essay is intelligent, as long as one accepts his set of implied assumptions. His assumptions can be discerned. They are:

- #1. The earth is of no importance; it doesn't even have to be mentioned as a factor in serious economic study.
- #2. It is a fact that the global economy and the global capitalists (read the multinational corporations) are in control. Their decisions determine how the U.S. economy goes, and if we don't like it we must accommodate to it anyway.
- #3. A primary responsibility of government is to shape taxation, education, and infrastructure in order to create conditions conducive to the establishment of multinational operations within our borders.
- #4. "... all (the wealth) that remains rooted within our borders is the American *people*. It is people and their state of education and their capabilities in problem identifying, problem solving, and brokering

between the two, that constitute wealth; not the natural endowment, but the ability of people to make the corporations succeed, that's what "real" wealth is.

#5. The success of the corporations is the proper goal for the employment of human talent. The purpose of being human is to serve the interests of big business.

#6. Materialism reigns as the philosophy of people and of government. People must be made to believe that the road to happiness is through the acquisition of stuff and money. Talented people need only to look after their own selfish interests. Economics is value free.

The illustrations Reich uses in making his points all have to do with providing more and better consumer stuff; better VCRs, more specialized computers, more and faster production of high fashion clothing, more precision and higher speed, and more customizing of all kinds of product. It is obvious that Reich sees the future in terms of greater and greater production and consumption. The rapidly emerging discovery that the success of the corporations impoverishes the earth has not reached his consciousness.

I do not believe he has ever heard of the Second Law of Thermodynamics: Factory production goes into the junk pile. Most production, especially high-tech production, involves poisonous wastes nobody knows how to get rid of. Work involves the transformation of earthstuff from one condition into another, ultimately less useful, condition. Since true wealth is earthstuff in its natural condition (trees, soil, minerals, habitat, water, air, diversity of species, and sunshine), the proper approach is to use them as sparingly as possible and to restore them as much as possible. The implication of that is: humans should work as little as possible, and a major share of that work ought to be directed at restoring used stuff to its natural usefulness. We don't need all this gadgetry, and its possession is not the key to happiness. The idea is to live as simply as one can in conformance with the need for the earth to flourish.

Happiness is to be found in a wholesome relationship with the earth and all of creation. The success of the human is a function of the success of the earth. The success of the earth is a function of the success of its parts. A river is a success when it fulfills the function of river. Properly functioning rivers are essential to a successful ecology, and therefore essential to the success of earth, and therefore essential to the function of humans. Mountains must be mountains; seashores,

seashores; swamps, swamps; forests, forests; elephants, elephants; and so with everything.

The function of humans is to be human. Thomas says: "The function of the human is to enable the universe to reflect on and celebrate itself in conscious self-awareness. All that has happened in the fifteen billion years of universe unfolding entered into this unique role that is fulfilled in and through the human." How is one most fully human? Answer: one is most fully human when work and play are directed to the success of the human endeavor and of the earth. The theory and practice of economics is critical to the solution of the problem of how best to be human. The assumptions with which one goes into the study determine the outcome. Robert Reich and the rest of the growth-and-progress society work on a set of assumptions that bring on the failure of both the human endeavor and of the earth. His recommendations are to be rejected because he does not know what the purpose of economic activity is. He does not know what the purpose of anything is.

Religion and philosophy both seek to answer the question of what the purpose of being human is. For centuries these two realms have shown themselves incompetent in dealing with the devastation being visited on the earth. Wendell Berry said, "We are living in the most destructive and, hence, the most stupid period of the history of our species. The list of abominations is long and hardly bearable." (Pages 61,62 - What are People For?). Can somebody get Robert Reich to pay attention? Thomas Berry says that the greatest reproach to our generation is our autism. We are unable to look outside ourselves where the truest revelation of the divine is manifested.

(The rest of this essay is contributed by Thomas Berry, who is visiting.)

Speaking to the purpose of things, there is no extrinsic purpose to the universe, no utility. The purpose of the universe is simply the glory of existence in its comprehensive grandeur and in each of its distinctive components, and the term for this glory in existence is celebration. By its flight through the air, the magnificent flash of brilliant coloration, by its song, its mating, its nesting, its feeding its young, the bluebird celebrates. The winds celebrate by their movement over the earth, the rain by its nourishing. The human joins in song and dance and poetry, by art and story telling, by rejoicing through the seasons, by our weddings and family life, our play with our children. If all this is done in a considerable amount of pain and stress and challenge, that only

adds to the healing and the conservation and the sense of meaning of it all. There is indeed work to be done, but work is not properly a job to be done for money as employee of some corporate enterprise plundering the planet for monetary gain. Work is to be an integral part of the adventure of living! The benefits, proposed by our economists, that spring out of the success of the global economy, are simply not in the human order. They lead to desolation, isolation, and devastation.

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