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Human Life: Beyond Money, Ideology and Productive Forces

Part III

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Theme: History

GROWING THE LIFE GOODS BASE:

BEYOND MONEY, IDEOLOGY AND PRODUCTIVE FORCES

by Professor John McMurtry

The problem of a criterial measure of human life needs is a life-and-death matter. Yet the reigning economic theory since Adam Smith everywhere conflates needs with wants, and necessity with system demand. In Anglo-American justice theory as well as economics and studied philosophy in general, no criterion of life need ever arises. The concept in principled form might as well be outlawed. John Rawls' standard-bearing "primary goods", for example, is decoupled from life needs altogether. The ruling proxy of "income" substitutes for them.

Theory in general continues the effective prohibition even in the political economy discourses of the Left which become track capitalist-system mechanics with no welfare index or standard of life need to ground meaning in *life necessity itself*. One might say there is a pathological blinker against the life-value meaning of needs in Western civilisation – except that Eastern civilization is more blinkered still. It does not and cannot distinguish between a vital human need and an extinguishable attachment in its Vedanta and Buddhist forms. Confucianism prioritizes propriety to superiors over the life needs of anyone. For all, unsatisfied life needs are wordlessly presupposed as a problem of the lower classes. The decorum of the rich over centuries and across cultures gives the illusion they are above universal life needs because unbroken by them in their privilege of guaranteed provision.

The great exceptions are Lao Tzu in the East and the recorded Jesus in the West, who speaks of "feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, giving shelter to the homeless". Nonetheless official culture and lead thinkers normally subjectivise need a-priori, and almost never relate rights to defined life needs. Philosophy seeks to understand the ultimately regulating principles of the human condition, but has avoided this ultimate issue from the beginning – most dogmatically since its linguistic turn of the twentieth century. Economics is meant to comprehend *production and distribution of otherwise scarce goods for human society to live and live better from*, but is blind to the production of universal life goods at any level – in fact, an *anti*-economics which is indifferent to the difference between need and want, and all waste beyond money costs.

History is supposed to find the deciding ground of what uprisings and forward movements of

peoples are about if it is to understand what is going on, but ruling-order provision of life necessities and goods for society and its technological-social possibility remain unexamined as an historical struggle and trend.

Does any social science do better? The general fact is that is that no higher-order theory of rights and social justice grounds in the life-and-death necessities of human existence. Even materialist theories avoid universal human life needs. The ancient Carvaka of India focused on voluptuous desires, and no known materialist doctrine since has comprehended or researched a universal life-necessity framework.

Why Marx Does not Solve the Problem

Karl Marx brought European ideology "down to earth", but begins *Capital* by saying on the first page that "the nature of human wants, whether for instance they spring from the stomach or fancy, makes no difference" to his study. The issue of the life goods all people need to live and live well has been essentially a blank slate except in medicine, and as we know its contemporary dominant forms have been biased towards expensive corporate commodities for profit – exotic machines, traumatic body mechanics, and corporate pharmaceuticals for symptoms.

Even with the new welfare indexes where we seem at last to be getting towards the life base for rights, duties and social justice, there is no criterion of life necessity or good in any. A leading formation of such an index in Canada, The Canadian Well-Being Index, is a case in point. When provided with formal demonstration of the universal needs principle and framework required for any concept of welfare to be life coherent, the assembled experts "greeted it with a strange silence and would not engage it" in the words of its medical adviser. This response is symptomatic of an underlying syntax of contemporary thought which *blocks out the very life-ground of humanity's universal requirements of existence as its formal habit of rational thought*.

Predictable Downfall of Human and Planetary Life Until Life-Value Turn

It is no wonder that no social or natural life support systems are any longer secure. This is a *predictable* fatal consequence at a system level. Its money-sequenced depredation only becomes worse until the system is re-set in terms of universal life necessities which, in fact, exclude nothing worthwhile. Test that claim in your own experience in light of what has been agreed to by the universality of all the needs identified by the primary axiom and N-criterion. This is the only *life security* that matters, but "security" in state-and-corpse speak is the systemic opposite. This is a testable law of its nature. It is not human nature, but *elimination* of human nature as life coherent to favour money sequences becoming more – the cancer stage of capitalism

Life-value analysis, in contrast, begins with humanity's necessary life goods as its terrestrial ground. Standard categories like "income", "primary goods", "prosperity", "rights", "freedoms" and so on are discovered under analysis to have no criterial meaning of life value at all. One must therefore build from the life-ground up.

Once research and reflection manage to arrive at defining principled grounds of humanity's universal life necessities and goods, it can work towards laying bare a unifying framework of them – a difficult road in a cognitive context in which countless varieties of relativism, differences, custom and resistance rule out such a research project a-priori.

Again we find there is virtually nothing to go on that is criterially well formed and life-grounded at once. The need criteria defined by the analysis of section II provide this missing baseline. They are life-grounded and can be verified and tested by one's own experience.

Without such a principled life-ground one is at an onto-axiological loss. One cannot truly know what human beings have rights to as human or what social justice consists in. The life base and principled substance of what really matters are altogether missing.

Emptiness and arbitrariness of rights thus follow. The distinguishing feature of life-value understanding is that it re-grounds thought and analysis at the level of human life necessities and capacities themselves, and in the ecological support systems that make them possible at the same time.

From Moral and Legal Philosophy to Marxian Revolution: The Missing Life-Ground

Moral and legal philosophers have nowhere yet so grounded.

Readers may think Marx has. He certainly begins to re-ground in human life needs and capacities, but on closer examination his ultimate base is found to be historical productive force development which he *assumes* realizes human life needs and capacities *and* necessitates the revolution of capitalism to full human freedom and self-realisation at the same time. Yet Marx and Marxists have never provided *life-value criteria* to explain or to bridge the three levels of life-and-death issue which are skipped over here:

(1) why seizure of the state from capitalist control is ensured against the systematic life-blindness of the order it grows out of;

(2) what collective life-values there are to guide this state rule and its productive force development beyond more material output as an end in itself; and

(3) how human life needs and capacities are to be enabled and fulfilled by this program as assumed rather than distorted or imprisoned by it.

The Modern Blind Eye: No Life-Value Standard to Steer Productive Development

Productive force development can go well or badly depending on its regulating value purpose –well if steered by life-value coordinates to realise human needs, badly if steered to maximise private profits or state-party power. In itself, productive force development means nothing but more material output. One of the greatest confusions of mankind is to assume that that more productivity or material output automatically means better lives and life conditions for people without any life-value criterion to show or enable this outcome.

Consider for ongoing example a state-led flooding conversion of the natural wonder of the Yangtze River Gorges into a central power dam with millions of lives forcibly uprooted and beaten if resistant, and long-term ecological catastrophe ignored by the ruling engineers of the Central Committee. Under the direction of private money capital, the outcomes can be much worse. More material output can be for nothing but more money-value to fast-profit stockholders with only more job losses, waste and junk left over. One cannot, in short, reasonably assume that technological advances or innovations in themselves serve human needs and capacities to live fuller lives. They can only reliably do so if life-value standards govern them, and they have never been so governed. Presumption has led without life-

standards or measures.

Marx was not as life-blind as classical and so-called neo-classical economics or states like China run by engineers. But he supposed life-value advance by productive force development as the ultimate principle of historical change. His essential justification is that private capitalist control for profit explains the monstrous outcomes of ever more machine and mass-labour powers. Yet however much this analysis explains, its argument cannot in principle meet the ultimate problem. For life-grounded standards are not only missing, but never formed. Without them to recognise the conflict between human life and life support requirements, on the one hand, and more and bigger material outputs on the other, only assumption of a better life for people is left to rely on – that is, magical thinking.

This has been the deepest onto-axiological fault-line of both the Marxian and the capitalist ideas. What is required to steer the world from its cumulative construction of human-and-terrestrial-life catastrophe is fatally screened out – the *life-coherent use of technology.* The capitalist story of the private market's invisible hand necessitating the best of all possible results or "optimal" social welfare may be the prototype of the life-blind logic of rule, but *whatever* doctrine is believed, only life-coherent technological development resolve the problem, and that requires regulating life standards at both human and ecological levels. The industrial method of factory and assembly-line production to ever vaster and world-changing forms can continue to be by slave-like mass labour and ever more nature-destructive machines and methods *or,* at the other pole of possibility, be led by coherent life standards to better ensure humanity's universal life necessities and goods including human vocation and environmental integrity of growth. That it can be made one way rather than the other is the deciding choice process of social rule-system.

The belief that the powers of production themselves "discipline, unite, and organise" the working class into revolutionary self-determination and human freedom is one of the still-believed formulae on the left that has blocked the life standards required. For every moment of this discipline and organising in capitalism is to save private money costs for absentee investors and to do so by turning all moments of production including workers into life-numbed mechanical functions. Why would people so conditioned, and permitted at best only to bargain for monetised benefits become an oppositely-structured force against their work-and-consumer conditioning around the clock?

Without life-values and their corresponding rights and obligations regulatively steering productive forces – a-priori screened out or denigrated by Marxist and capitalist discourses alike – hoped-for metamorphoses into optimal social states do not occur, but end in life-despoiling results. The results are socially constructed, not arranged by an invisible hand or dialectical laws. To steer by life-coherent standards rather than magical mechanism is the ultimate social choice space that has been lost. The long-term outcome has come to be virtually every life system in cumulative decline by a life-blind automatism which still leads at the front end of theory.[5]

The First Requirement of Social Justice:

Re-Grounding in Universal Human Life Goods

Soviet industrial development showed that the mounting life catastrophe is not only capitalist in nature. It too had few or no effective life-value standards. The infamous mass murders and system life oppressions in the name of liberation require no elaboration here.

In fact, they have provided the choral chant of capitalist propaganda since. Where states like Cuba or Venezuela in our time have better structured towards meeting basic life needs, they have been made international pariahs by the usual selective reporting for which provision of universal life necessities is blinkered out a-priori. They are called "despotic" from this standpoint.

While no thinking person should be duped by this Orwellian clamour, life-value analysis applies to clarify the problem on both sides. Neither Cuba nor Venezuela specifies principled life-value standards to ensure accountability of the ruling party to their realization. Clear recognition of atmospheric end environmental life goods, for example, does not register. Just as deeply, the human vocation to serve, express and enjoy human life capacities as an end-in-self of value is not a policy life standard. In Cuba which has been at its socialist revolution for 50 years in spite of U.S. continuous criminal embargo and violations of international law, it has nonetheless advanced far. In elite performances of conventional forms of sport, music, and dance, free scientific and literacy education to a universal level, and life-serving medical care at an international level of commitment, the accomplishments have been immense. Yet the critical dialogical development of the humanities, public discourses and political policy have lagged into near atrophy. So too have locally-led innovation and the resources to organise and implement better social living conditions on the ground – such as occurred in Chile in the barrios with state-provided materials and free self-directed home-building, before President Allende was murdered in 1973 by a Friedman-advised state dictatorship for the "free market".

Recognising the Human Vocation Above All

The *human vocation* is an ultimate need for life contribution and enjoyment which entails free critical speech, thought and creative action consistent with collective life-need requirements. But it remains at a backward stage of accommodation and development. This is the ultimate issue of *unrecognised* life need and humanisation of rights globally.

The so-called "developed world" under corporate globalization has gone rapidly backward in this respect. It has *cumulatively eliminated the human vocation* without noticing it by private money-sequence competition as its logic of rule. Even its critical higher education and research, once the leader of the world, have been subjugated to the corporate private-profit mechanism while the next generation has ever diminishing opportunities for any work but private-profit service jobs. In the 'Free World' and the Majority World at once, there is almost no vocational security at any life-serving function, rising unemployment for post-2008 youth in particular, and fewer livelihoods in the real economy of producing life-value goods. The unseen social bedrock of society, the civil commons analysed ahead, has been militantly defunded and privatised for profit. What does not turn a private money profit is defunded or funded so that it does.

Right of Access to Universal Life Goods: The Missing Argument

Life-value understanding makes a very important meta shift of rights towards each *person's right of access to a universal human life good* rather than being confined within the now ruling legal concept of *merely private rights to exclude all others for self-profit from whatever is held*. This is a foundational distinction which will be unpacked further ahead as the inner logic of an unseen war of rights systems is explained.

Here the grounding baseline of meaning is the universal life needs of *all* human beings across language, class and other divisions. Bear in mind that each and all of the goods specified in what follows meet the stringent criteria of a universal life good and necessity at once. Each, that is, denotes: (i) *a universal good* which is also (ii) a *universal necessity* that in every case (ii) *holds across individuals and cultures* (iv) *if and only if, and* (v) *to the extent that,* (vi) *deprivation of N* (vii) *always results in reduction of life capacity.*

Explanation needs to very exact here because there has been a long and world-wide confusion on these issues. Postmodern culture, relativism and scepticism of all kinds explicitly or tacitly refuse to accept any universal good or necessity at all. Philosophers over 200 and perhaps 2500 years have generally avoided the issue with no universal criterion evident in any known school. Both canonical philosophers and modern economists issuing from a philosophical school conflate needs and desires with no recognition of their ultimate distinction – *that all need objects enable life capacities, and do not admit of excess or perversion.* Conditioned market desires, preferences and wants are the opposite in principle, and serve only private profit whatever the cost in life capacity reduction at human and ecological levels – the disorder built into the system.

Yet amidst tireless variations on the slogans of "individual/consumer differences and choice" and "what is a need to some is a want to others", the absence of any ground of understanding humanity's ultimate directive meaning defines the age. Those who know perfectly well there are "basic needs" – even that for a human vocation – still give no principled ground of meaning.

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