

Oliver Stone's Snowden, North Dakota, Native-American Rights: The Solidarity of Seeing. "Truth about Motivation that has to do with Truth"

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Global Research, September 19, 2016

Region: [USA](#)

Theme: [Environment](#), [Oil and Energy](#),
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In Oliver Stone's Snowden, Ed Snowden supports the Iraq war while his girlfriend opposes it. He doesn't want to "bash" his government. "How can I make you see?", she asks him. Seeing is not something we do on our own, at least not if it means seeing the truth. It can be, as the film portrays, a slow, agonizing process. To see the truth, not already known, and especially if unexpected, it is not enough just to look.

Winona LaDuke, long-time Ashinaabe environmental activist, told *Democracy Now!* that the protests at Standing Rock, North Dakota, are like "Old Home Week". Thousands of Native Americans, representing hundreds of tribes from the US and Canada, are resisting the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline. It is a chance, she says, "to not have one more bad thing happen" to Native Americans, and to the US.

Many people – Native- and Euro-Americans – have made it possible to see the Dakota Access Pipeline as a bad thing, not just for those it directly affects, but for the world. Snowden did not easily see government surveillance as a bad thing. And when he did, he did not see it alone. How do we look at crumbling infrastructure, high suicide rates, and flooded lands, and see a bad thing, for every one of us?

There's a truth about motivation that has to do with truth. It's been known in many cultures, including indigenous cultures on several continents. It is now known to capitalist economists. 1 It is that human beings are not motivated by material incentives. Only for simple and uninteresting tasks do we perform better if we expect material gain. Instead, human connection motivates. It is often also discovered truth.

In the award-winning Spanish film, *Even the rain*, an anti-imperialist film crew, creating a documentary about European exploitation of indigenous peoples, doesn't understand the Bolivian Water Wars. They don't understand why their lead actor, also leading the protests, will not stop protesting so they can finish their film. The director does eventually see. He understands that "without water, there is no life".

He knew this truth before but did not grasp it. Now he makes new commitments. He becomes motivated, differently. Gabriel García Márquez refers to the "near mystical conviction that the greatest achievement of the human being is the proper formation of conscience and that moral incentives rather than material ones are capable of moving the world forward". 2.Yet it is not such a mystical view.

Throughout the sixties, Che Guevara argued against the Soviets' policy of stimulating productivity by offering material incentives. Guevara insisted on moral, not material incentives. What matters, he writes, "is that each day individuals are acquiring ever more consciousness of the need for their incorporation into society and, at the same time, of their importance as the motor of that society". 3

And as they do so, they acquire understanding, imagination. Guevara had a view of human motivation supported by recent studies: We are motivated by a sense of belonging. Soldiers move into the line of fire, they say, not for love of country or ideals, but because of connection to their peers. Shared humanity motivates people to risk their lives. 4 People without real connection become sick.

Yet morality itself is not always motivating. Marx even claimed that historical materialism has "broken the staff of all morality" by showing how morality is a product of social conditions, advancing powerful interests. "Moral", though, can be understood more broadly, to include respect for dignity, which is about humanness. We respect someone, including ourselves, when we see them *as a person*.

Such seeing is not automatic. We may need to be helped to see, as Snowden is, in the film. Marx knew this. So did Che. Connectivity is trendy now, academically. But its formulation is often a "demonic parody" 5 of its real force. It means, as LaDuke says, that we can't talk about Gaza if we can't talk about Wounded Knee. 6 This is because we can't see Gaza properly. We think properly only with real solidarity.

The truly mystical view of motivation is the one popularized by liberal philosophers. It is called instrumental rationality. I wrote my PhD dissertation on this view. I didn't do that because it interested me. The view always struck me as unrealistic. I wanted to write on feminism or Gramsci's socialism but was told I'd be there a long time if I did. Such topics were not part of the canon of analytic philosophy.

Instrumental rationality is the view that we act reasonably, in a non-moral sense, when we choose options most likely to realize deep-seated desires, preferences and life plans, within specified limits. The idea is that rationality involves considering likely outcomes, imagining consequences, and doing what, in light of probable consequences, will bring best results in terms of my "inner voice", roughly, my desires.

It works for uninteresting choices like which restaurant to enter. If I choose one restaurant and learn later that the other choice had more of the foods I like to eat, I conclude that I made the wrong choice, for me. Instrumental rationality is an idealization. Of course, we don't always have all the information. The right choice is the one I *would* make *if* I could properly envision the consequences, etc., etc., etc.

I found the view unsatisfying for one reason in particular: My deep seated desires, preferences and life plans may be the unlucky result of a messed up society. It wasn't an uncommon insight for people who, like me, came of age during the Vietnam War. TV images showed Vietnamese children burned by US Napalm bombs in the name of democracy. We knew we'd been lied to about freedom and democracy.

Students at Berkeley explicitly identified their privilege as damaging. 7 Studying at a "good school", they had special access to key social values, like freedom. Such values, exposed as false, informed their identity. So they didn't trust their identity. Some didn't trust their own

thinking. Doing drugs made sense, to a point. It was a way of seeing the world differently, an opportunity to escape one's mind.

I didn't understand the appeal of the liberal view of motivation. By the end of the twentieth century, it was well-known that thinking depends upon culture. How we see things, and whether we see things, is explained by practises. Seeing a cup *as a cup* is explained by culture. If I had a different background, involving different practises, I could look at the same item and not see a cup, or indeed anything at all.

Marx knew this. His view of dialectical materialism means, roughly, that the world is structured dialectically because of universal laws of causation. It has to do with how we think, meaning we can't think about who we are without adequate social relations, made possible by economic justice and by culture. It means we need others *to see*. It is the Marx that many twentieth-century Marxists missed. 8

Guevara had no truck with instrumental rationality. He recognized interdependence. "In this period of the building of socialism, we can see the new man being born", he wrote. 9 He didn't mean some particular man/woman, as some critics claim, for the "image is not yet completely finished— it never will be, since the process goes forward hand in hand with the development of new economic forms."

His "moral incentives" express a simple truth: Material rewards don't give anything back, humanly. They don't promote human capacities. Solidarity does. And economists now know this. The implication, though, is that in order to be realistic, to see the truth and to talk about it, we have to acknowledge, as Winona LaDuke says, that we are one huge settlement on stolen land. There's no other way.

Hence, the motivation provided by the "march of humanity" out of exploitation and oppression. 10 José Martí wrote, "We are striving for truth, not for dreams". 11 But some truths are not easy. They become accessible only through change toward a better world. The liberal "myth of the self-made man" cannot explain truths needed for the march of humanity. It denies the motivation we need to discover them.

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2. A personal portrait of Fidel. In *Fidel: My early years* Ocean Press, p. 24.
3. Guevara, Che. (1997). Man and socialism in Cuba. In David Deutschman (Ed.), *The Che Guevara reader*. Ocean Press. Pp. 207– 8.
4. E.g. Sebastian Junger, *Tribe: On homecoming and belonging*
5. *Ivan Illich, cited in David Cayley, "Introduction", Rivers North of the Future (Anansi Press, 2005) 41*
6. <http://mondoweiss.net/2012/11/winona-laduke-we-cant-talk-about-israel-because-we-are-israel/#sthash.nG7asruA.dpuf>
7. Documentary: *Berkeley in the sixties*
8. *Hart Dávalos, Armando, Ética, política y cultura (Havana: Estudios Martianos, 2006) 129f.; Allen Wood, Karl Marx (Routledge 2004) 266*
9. *Man and socialism: 203*
10. *The Second declaration of Havana, 1962*
11. "With All, for the Good of All," 1891

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