

The Universal Human Life Necessities: The Life Ground of Economics and Human Rights Defined

Part IV

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Theme: [History](#)

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Before identifying the set of universal life needs and goods which frame the issues of rights and social justice for a life-coherent standpoint, there are a number of issues to be considered as one works through them. Every sphere of goods defined ahead is necessary to human well-being by the N-axiom, but to very different *degrees of necessity* from one good to another.

For obvious example, deprivation of clean water is more immediately life-destructive than of cultural goods by the measure of reduced life capacity towards death, but cultural goods are nonetheless necessary to a human life by the same measure. One should also keep in mind that even if most humans alive have not had *sufficient* access to these goods, it remains true by life-need criterion and measure that they are reduced in their life capacities even if this reduction has become normalized. For official measures of people's welfare have no life coordinates. Only an aggregate average of private money-demand is involved, and so only private priced commodities which may be junk or disease-causing are covered. Thus a rise of commodities and services bought and sold is consistent with, in fact, *more* impoverishment in a society's life goods – its jobs, its environment, its foods, and its natural resources.

Perhaps no absurdity has been more ruinous than the private money-demand measures of human well-being and development. One day it will seem more lethally fatuous than buying indulgences from the Church to bring life welfare. Yet innumerable false doctrines collaborate in disconnecting corporate, state, popular and academic intelligence from objective life values, and *so too rights and obligations*. Even democratic theory has become ungrounded from what people require to live and live well. With the ruling model as electoral headcounts in a corporate-state field of propaganda, a majority can be indoctrinated to support as “freedom” a belligerent war on cue or the depredations of children's lives.

High theory does not re-ground, but de-grounds further. Fictitious contractarian models and debates with no life-ground nor organic need nor mention of corporate profit itself multiply in name journals, books and graduate schools as “the latest research on justice”. In opposition to all this, life-value understanding recognises that real development and social justice advance by better provision of universal life goods and necessities to people without which they suffer loss of life capacity – an objective fact admitting of objective degrees of advance or regression as more or less people are nourished or malnourished by them. Theories and practises are thus obliged to face a *life-coherence principle of validity* – that is, whether their positions are consistent with or blind to the most universal requirements of

continued human and planetary well-being.

In short, life-value understanding reconnects to the common life-ground and the universal necessities and goods each and all objectively need to live a human life. This is the life-value meaning of the Socratic wisdom that “an unexamined life is not worth living”.

Blocking Out Life Necessity: The Compulsion of High Theory

Whatever creative choices one might make and be individuated by within the range of possibilities opened by access to these life goods, they are required by every human being and human rights and social justice correspond in their development to the provision of them to enable the lives of all.

Yet no sooner are such words as “universal” and “necessary” out than charges of “communism”, “paternalism”, “the terrorist universal” and so on unleashed. In high theory as well as the capitalist market, a conventional thought-space of life-disconnect reigns. A useful experiment here is to identify *any* universal and necessary life good whatever for humanity which is acknowledged *as such* in the entire literature of contemporary higher-order thought outside life-value theory.

As perhaps future inhabitants of the globe may recognise in amazement that any future life was possible, this disconnect has been so complete and complaisant that most in governing circles and the academy resist any system understanding of what is happening even as the ice-caps melt and the next generation cannot find a livelihood or vocation. What is miscalled “the economy” has one supreme law that overrides all life requirements whatever – to turn private money into more money for its possessors *ad infinitum* through corporate money-and-commodity vehicles.

The mind-lock binding acceptance, in turn, is that this system is *alone capable of “delivering the goods” when in fact it increasingly despoils life goods and rights across domains*. Yet one can only know this if one knows *what these life goods are*. .

The Universal Life Needs and Goods: Explaining the Base of All Rights and Obligations

In the unifying life-value framework of needs/goods defined ahead, each is a *universal life necessity and good* because no-one across cultures can be deprived of it without losing life capacity towards inhuman existence or death. All are also *distinct* from each other because none can be provided for by any or all of the rest.

These general facts may be tested through every one. The universal necessity of each also confers a universal human right to it and the obligation to ensure it where lacking. This follows from the principle of consistency and non-contradiction in any coherent ought statement. If it is a life necessity and good for all, all ought to have it so far as materially possible, or the moral position is incoherent with life and fact at the same time.

It is the greatest failure of the global corporate market order that *none* of these universal human life goods and necessities is ensured by its organising system because it depends on scarcity and attends only to private payment of price. It thus fallaciously shifts necessity onto the demands of its own doctrine, and so its value calculus is indifferent to whether any of these life needs are met, or are violated root and branch. Instead the internal dogmas of its thought-system are called “laws”, “necessity” and “reality” all at once. This is the false metaphysic of this disorder that is so endlessly assumed and repeated that it is not seen.

Society is thus held in a post-hypnotic trance of the ruling doctrine as in a fanatical religion.

Beyond the Invisible Hand: Naming Humanity's Universal Life Necessities and Goods

In contrast, what is self-evidently true in fact, principle and experience are the universal life goods and necessities of all human beings. Their real goods are what any life-coherent economy should seek to achieve. They enable the long elusive "good life" in defined substance, while also satisfying all reasonable claims to human rights.

Deprived of any of these universal life necessities/goods, and *to the extent* of this deprivation, economic decline and social injustice follow together in correlation to the deprivation of these life goods when their protection and provision is possible. Again we need to be aware that their provision constitutes the sole necessity of the real economy and human rights at once:

(1) the *atmospheric goods* of unpolluted air, sunlight, climate cycles, and seeing-hearing space;

(2) the *bodily goods* of clean water, nourishing food, fit clothing, and waste disposal;

(3) the *home good* of shelter from the elements and noxious animals/materials with the means to sleep and freely function;

(4) the *environmental good* of natural and constructed elements contributing to a life-supporting whole;

(5) the *social goods* of reliable care through time by supportive love, work-day limits/safety, accessible healthcare, and security of person;

(6) the *cultural goods* of language, the arts, participant civil rights, and play; and

(7) the *vocational good* of enabling and obliging each to contribute to the provision of these universal life goods consistent with the enjoyment of them.

How to Test the Universal Life Goods and Necessities for Validity

The reader is invited to *test* this needs/goods index at every point. Two questions arise for any sound criterion or definition, and they are worth applying to each and all members of the whole set. Is anything claimed that is *not* a demonstrable universal need/good by the N-criterion? Or is anything *missing* from the set?

In elementary logic, these are known as the questions of "too broad?" or "too narrow?" They are posed to *any* definition or criterion of any principle, and they take us through all the questions and debate required to know the sound answer. This is the process of truth for life-value onto-axiology, *the process of more coherently inclusive taking into account*. The resting point of *valid* criterion is reached when there are no exceptions to show that the frame of life needs and goods above is too narrow *or* too broad in any element or as a complete set. The process moves through testing counterexamples as long as these can be given, at which point one knows the provisionally sound criterion or definition. If this set of universal life needs/goods of human beings across cultures still stands in the face of counter-argument until no life-coherent candidate remains, then it has stood the test of truth.

Sufficiency and Insufficiency of Provision Recognised by Life Capacity Margins

Once we reach this point, we recall the principle of measure. Each and all of these universal life goods admit of *sufficiency* or *insufficiency* which is definable by the *margin gain, or loss, of life range with, or without, provision*. Sufficiency is reached when no life good is missing from this set without which life capacities are reduced – a condition that flourishing human lives and societies both enjoy and provide for.

It should by now be clear in the face of long confusion and nonsense on this point that socially assured sufficiency of life goods does *not* mean authoritarian government or levelling of individuation and diversity. The goods are universal necessities of a human life, not dictated by central authority or anyone else. People's lives are precisely not levelled, as now, but ensured provision. On the contrary, they are enabled to be *far more diverse and individuated* with more life and choice space than before.

Thinking Through "From Each According to Ability, To Each According to Needs"

The universal ethic and social justice of the principle "from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs" is here provided with what it has lacked – the precise criteria, defined content and comprehensive meaning of "needs". While life-value understanding agrees with the general principle, it first recognises and confronts three major problems which have not been resolved by this classic formula:

- (1) *"Needs" themselves have remained without criterion or definition*. Thus damaging habits conceived as needs may qualify as benefits, leading to disabling consequences and disputes.
- (2) *The "ability" expected from each is not grounded in human life capacities*. Thus dehumanizing use of abilities can be obliged, allowing for distortion of their underlying capacities;
- (3) *There is no principled linkage between needs and abilities* to ensure system life coherence;
- (4) *With no defined criteria of the burden-benefit sides of this principle of social justice*, it remains a slogan without defined substance or directive meaning

(1) to (4) explain the great shortcomings of this timeless idea which have led to the rejection of it as vague, utopian, ungrounded and so on. These are not merely academic issues. The idea's greatest advocate, Marx himself, affirmed 'need' growth with no limit (e.g., he affirmed cigarettes and mansions as needs if these were the norm of the stage of productive development of the society in question), and he uncritically assumed that this productive development conditioning these 'needs' was their inexorable external determiner. What other great philosophies like Buddhism and Lao tsu's Taoism affirmed as the ultimate choice-space of humanity – release from conditioned desires – was not only ignored, but explicitly overridden by affirmation of 'need' growth without end. Need growth without limit is a principle shared with subsequent economics, and it mischievously justifies ever more corporate market growth as necessary and good.

In this way, both the ruling disorder and its Marxian alternative affirm perhaps the most ruinous assumption of modern thought. Nowhere is *life-value* analysis more demanded than here. It recognises only needs whose goods enable life capacities that are always reduced

without them, and derives all needs from this anchoring principle of life value.

Thus grounded, humanity's social and historical advance can be objectively told as distinguished from merely propagandised or confounded by ambiguity and disputation. Governing value standards are, in short, finally defined in life-coherent terms, and conditioned wants can be exposed for what they are by objective life-value coordinates. Human rights and social justice are thus provided with their lost life-ground.

The references as well as endnotes apply to the entire sixteen part series of Professor McMurtry's essay.

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Notes

1 The fallacious logic and devious strategy of Locke's argument is anatomized step by step in *Value Wars: The Global Market versus the Life Economy*, London: Pluto Press, pp.65-73.

2 *What is Good? What is Bad? The Value of All Values Across Time, Place and Theories*, Oxford: Eolss Publishers under the auspices of Unesco, 2010.

3 The formal axiom of life value is: x is of value if and only if, and to the extent that, it constitutes or enables a more coherently inclusive range of life than without it: within the fields of life of thought (conceptual and image), felt side of being (sentience, emotion, mood), and/or action (animate movement through space-time). Conversely, x is of disvalue if and only if, and to the extent that, it disables life so defined.

4 The literature here has become huge, but Amartya Sen (1992) *Inequality ReExamined* Cambridge Mass: Harvard University Press is a good place to start, and discussion around the capabilities touchstone of equality is found in Martha Nussbaum and Sen Nussbaum, M. and Sen, eds. (1993) *The Quality of Life*. Clarendon: Oxford University Press, along with relevant work by G.A. Cohen, Onera O'Oneill, Hilary Putnam, Charles Taylor, and Michael Walzer. Nussbaum (2000), *Women and Human Development. The Capabilities Approach* New York: Cambridge Univeraity Press provides her most in-depth account.

5 Philip Mirowski's *Machine Dreams* (2000) is a very informed study tracking the machine model in contemporary market economic theory into the "automaton theater" of economic, military and decision-theory research today - extending the magic thinking of the invisible hand's necessitation of the best of possible worlds into the mechanism of life-blind system automatism..

6 *Mathematical Psychics* (1881[1932], London: London School of Economics). Bernard Hodgson spells out the implications in his *Economics as Moral Science* (2001), Heidelberg: Springer Press..

7 Edward Bernays, a nephew of Freud , explains how in his *Propaganda* (1933) New York: Liverright. As the primary pioneer of modern mass-market conditioning, he identifies the key of the process is to appeal to and control unconscious desires to sell commodities and engineer social consent. My essay entry, "The Ruling Group-Mind" (in the *Encyclopedia of Case-Study Research* (2008), Toronto: Sage) spells out the unexamined premises and systematically life-destructive consequences of the group-mind phenomenon.

8 Amartya Sen's Nobel Speech on "Social Choice" preconsciously reveals the problem. In his immense bibliography, there is no concept of social choice he reports that does not assume it as an aggregate of individual agents choosing in market, electoral or other such atomic grid of choice space.

9 Pareto, Vilfredo, (1971 [1906]), *Manual of Political Economy*, New York: A.M. Kelley. Few realise that Pareto's classic is based on dyadic asset exchange with no relation to life needs, given distribution, work hours, ecological support systems, or economic performance.

10 This argument is made in "The Case for Children's Liberation", *Interchange* (1979-80) 10:3, with

Critical Response and Reply.

11 Adam Smith (1776/1966), *An Inquiry into Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*. New York: A.M. Kelley, p.85 (Book I, Chapter III, "Wages of Labour").

12 In a paradigm- setting state Supreme Court decision (Dodge v. Ford Motor Co., 204 Michigan 459 (1919), for example, the Court held in a precedent ruling that has not since been overturned that it is a violation of "the lawful power of a corporation" to decide anything not "organized for the profit of the stockholders". In this case, even Henry Ford's *own* plan to "employ more men, to spread the benefits of this industrial system to the greatest possible number, to help them build up their lives and homes" was ruled illegal. It transgressed the rights of corporate stockholders to maximum profits revenues to themselves. In short, the corporate person could not plan for the life benefits of anyone, even "the greatest possible number" of real persons, without violating its legal purpose of private money sequencing to maximally more for money-stock investors. The corporate person remains programmed by law to this one overriding goal *in exclusion of* providing more life means for more people by still-profitable business.

13 McMurtry (1999/2002), *The Cancer Stage of Capitalism* (London and Tokyo: Pluto and Springer Press) explains this anomaly and the underlying money-sequence source and cause of cumulative world system collapse.

14 Little known even today is that the Ford, General Motors, IBM and Dupont corporations produced for the Nazi war machine in these functions even after the U.S. was at war with it (Charles Higham, *Trading with the Enemy: An Expose of the Nazi-American Money Plot 1933-1949*. New York, Dell Publishing Co., 1983). Moreover these corporations received government compensation for their bombed factories and losses in Germany after the war was ended, an indication of the supreme and borderless power wielded upon which the 'New World Order', a Nazi concept, was instituted by national and international mechanisms of law identified in this paper.

15 I have tracked these strategic patterns in depth in prior work such as *Unequal Freedoms: The Global Market as an Ethical System* (1998) Toronto: Garamond/University of Toronto Press.

16 The underlying fascist logic is explained in my *Fascism and Neo-Conservatism: Is There a Difference?* (1984), "Praxis International 4 (1), 86-102.

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