

Everyday economic insanity

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Behold, the machine!

You can see it - step back and look! See the earth spin! See it! See it rotating, ploughing its elliptical course. See it wandering - see as it, and its friends, plot a course through the galaxy. See the heavens move, see the ecliptic dance through the void! But look at the earth - look closer - it spins like a machine too.

One side is dark, one side is always dark - but we try to keep it alight. But it spins, and it comes into the light, every day! And as the sun rises, the lights go out and the machine comes to life. Organisms wake, risen by the gentle sun. Organisms clamber into metallic capsules to transport themselves to larger concrete-metallic capsules. Organisms spend the light in darkness - in artificial light - performing aimless tasks, not for themselves, but for others. The masters supply them with food in return. They choke their cities, they choke their roads, they choke their buildings. And as darkness once more approaches, they reverse the process, and retire into darkness. Not happier, but a little richer. Not more connected, but functional. Not more aware, but wary. Not more knowledgeable. Not more fulfilled. Not self-directed, but directed. Not powerful. Not in control. To be repeated. Organisms in a machine.

Fed information through a metal box, fed entertainment through a metal box, fed suggestions through a metal box. Now with a flat screen. Rarely breaking free, and then by swallowing a favourite chemical and pretending to do so. Without opportunity to wonder, without opportunity to ask, without opportunity to imagine, without opportunity to connect, without opportunity to build alternatives - though with the right, and perhaps even the duty, to do so. Life is as ritualised, as habitual, as the life of insects - or so it seems from outside. To participate in this society is to function as a cog in a machine. To participate is not to understand the machine; not to oversee the cog, as part of a smooth connected system; not to maintain and improve the cog; not even to turn the cog, as an independent operator; but *to be the cog* - rusted, damaged, used, operated by others, dumb, metallic, but at least playing a part. And even if the cog can feel its connections with others nearby, that does not mean there is anything meaningful really there. A disconnected, lonely, purposeless, single component. How does a cog feel?

Look at what we are! A vast interconnected apparatus, a global automaton with only partially independent components, the economic mechanism of the

world. But though we may be directed, nothing directs the machine. The machine is self-sustaining, self-directing and self-justifying. It is autological, it describes itself, it grows itself, it develops itself. And to what end? What does it do? What is it for? Not to alleviate hunger; otherwise we would have succeeded centuries ago. Not to end poverty; poverty worsens everywhere. Not to cure illness; health systems are an annoyance to it. Not to solve political problems; they certainly are not improving. Not to end inequality; not to establish community; and least of all to establish freedom. Cogs are not free.

No, not in the least. We produce, produce, produce more. We consume, consume, consume more - if we can afford it. To buy is to fulfil oneself, to be like others, to impersonate impossible images on the metal boxes and slick glossy sickly pages, to find solace from the walking disasters of our lives. We produce commodities so they can be consumed. We produce, so that we can be paid, and eat, and consume. We may as well consume, because others consume more. We consume, thereby allowing others to produce. We produce and in the process we are consumed. We produce, and we consume. Whether any of this is necessary, or wanted, is irrelevant - if someone buys it, because they are induced to buy it, that is enough. To make others toil is justification in itself. And in the process we can rip out the bowels of the earth, rape it, castrate it, destroy its ability to reproduce and to sustain itself, drink its blood - burn its blood and choke it with the gas! - bury it with waste, pock it with our weapons, and in general, proceed upon the assumption that this startling terrestrial platform upon which we traverse the stars is no more than a factory for unnecessary material desires, a lump of raw materials to be appropriated, and an interstellar wasteground to be consumed, itself, until it is dead, ruined, and unfulfilled, along with most of its organisms. With little understanding of what we are doing - and with horror at the consequences, as we do it! - alas, we do it. This is the logic of the machine.

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It is a very common point of view. Almost surely you have seen it, heard it, read about it or discussed it at some point. Within present-day Western culture, there is a tremendously strong thread of deep-seated pessimism about our lives and our prospects for the future, even nihilism. Popular music groups sing songs about it; popular books are written about it; the commercial world is constrained usually not to talk about it, but it is there; it lurks behind all discussion of work, of economic life, of the environment, and of globalisation. The world is becoming a marketplace, with unrestrained capitalism impossible to avoid. Communism is dead, and there is no alternative, nothing better than the global capitalist system, or at least so says conventional wisdom. Greed is good, we are told; or at least, we cannot do any better. Our lives are saturated with advertising, marketing imagery, and urges to consume one or another product. Our work is becoming harder, dumber, more controlled, more supervised, more contract-based, and less secure. Companies downsize, lay off workers, transfer production to cheaper or more pliant labour markets; all as they reap record profits. Our lives are meaningless, not only in a philosophical sense, but also in the sense that there is no rhyme or reason, and no satisfaction, but only

degradation, repetition, subservience, misery, and arbitrary bouts of suffering, in the actions we perform every day, in that part we call 'work'; and added to this, we are probably doomed. In short - everything is wrong.

We ought to be very careful before lapsing into hopelessness: indeed I think there are good reasons for avoiding it. The institutions of global capitalism, of corporate media, and of State power may not be as inevitable and eternal as they seem or are made out to be; indeed they are historically young, possibly aberrations, and the most cursory glance at history demonstrates just how quickly and thoroughly society can change. Given this flexibility - this notion that our social structures are actually contingent, temporary, and possibly arbitrary - there most certainly are alternatives.

But nevertheless, if we are to describe present-day Western culture, then we cannot avoid describing this phenomenon. This is what we hear, when in our culture we are not being bombarded by advertising, political spin, or triumphant academics ('conservative' or 'liberal') - which we are, most of the time, especially when we access the media. It is a theme pervading culture; whether we agree with it is another matter. If we are to examine this cultural phenomenon, we must look behind the specific cultural expressions of this mood, and avoid getting bogged down in the psychology of this helplessness: what is the source of these sentiments?

Well, one can point to various things, for instance the decline of religion, the looming energy crisis, environmental disaster, the apparent collapse of alternatives to capitalism. But the phenomenon persists even among many people who do not think about religion or philosophy or environmental issues or the history or future of human society; they live and shop in the present. The opening passage of this chapter suggests that it runs together with our *economics* and its values: materialism, capitalism, individualism and consumerism. So let us try investigate the economic side of the question; let us try to be a little more precise about economics, at the everyday level.

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What are we talking about? What is the scope of these opening comments? They deal with *economics* - economics in everyday life. We are talking about how our participation, as individuals, in the economic life of our society, affects us - and pointing out ways in which we do not like it. To be clear, then, what do I mean by 'economics'? What do 'economists' mean by this word? When I refer to 'economics', I am referring to anything in our lives that is to do with the *material* aspect of our lives, and more - I am referring to anything involving *services* too. That includes everything involved with buying and selling products (material products or services); this involves everything to do with the production, marketing, and consumption of these products; it involves anything to do with the money we use to pay for these products, including finance, banking, and investment; it involves all 'work', including work that goes unpaid, such as raising children and domestic work; and it involves other things like services which we also pay for with money (so 'material' is not such a good word to use). That is an awful lot - it is most of our everyday lives! But it does not involve, directly at least, say, the following: sport and recreation (even though all sport more or-

ganised than children kicking a football on the street is highly commercialised); culture and art (apart from things like buying a ticket or promoting a concert); morality and ethics (though these are constrained by and inform economics); politics per se (though the connections between economics and politics are vast and numerous); gender, courtship and sex (even though advertising constantly plays on these themes to sell anything); and kinship, and family matters (even though the family is a target for advertising, and the major consumption unit). Still, an awful lot! And this is not a rigorous definition; nor is it necessarily a natural definition. Is this a useful concept? Is it a universal definition, which still applies to differently operating societies? Every society has an economy, but does it have money, or investment, or marketing? And so on; we can ask such questions all day. For now, the point is merely (a) to get a basic idea what is meant by this concept of 'economics'; (b) to realise that most of our everyday lives, and our entire working and consuming lives are part of this concept; (c) even though economics derives from very 'material' things like 'work', it has many psychological, philosophical and emotional consequences; and (d) that we would like to understand how the 'economic' aspects of everyday life affect us.

Let us then try to describe in detail some of the aspects of everyday economic life, here on earth, today, now. Let us try to step back and obtain some perspective on the matter. There is a planet with humans on it; and they need all sorts of material sustenance to survive; they often want more, for comfort and enjoyment. How do they do it? The institutions they establish for this material sustenance, and beyond that for their higher-level needs and desires, constitute the economy. Let us examine a few aspects of this process, from the global level downward to everyday life across the world.

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Look at us with our Western and affluent biases! For most of the world, these issues do not even arise! Are they not just the whining of spoiled little rich children? For the less developed nations, the lives described above are beyond their inhabitants' wildest dreams if their dreams are so banal, perhaps. The answer to the question has to be, "of course!", and the lack of aid, of international economic and social cooperation for worldwide development is simply criminal.

But, pleading guilty as charged, I mean something else; I focus on a *stronger* case. I mean that *even* in the so-called developed nations, *even* when the society is supposedly wealthy, *even* when the political system is highly democratic and allows a great deal of free expression in life, *even* in these cases we have a terrible social malaise, we are not happier, and we are not more fulfilled. *And*, it is in the developed world that causes most environmental destruction and where unsustainable consumption takes place. So, by focusing on the affluent parts of the world, we examine the strongest case; the rest of the world aspires to this.

We will briefly consider the global situation, and then narrow to the developed nations.

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The State as economic barrier. This division of the world into rich and poor nations, developed and underdeveloped countries, global North and global

South, has another aspect. One may well regard the state, as a political geographic entity, as arbitrary and possibly absurd. But of course, the political barriers include with them economic barriers. They fence off poor populations; they prevent migration to more affluent regions. Only because of this division, and the general prohibition on immigration into affluent regions, may we speak of 'poor countries'. And a natural response for an inhabitant of an impoverished country would be, as soon as possible, to move to a more affluent region. Mexico to the United States; South East Asia to Australia; Eastern Europe to Western Europe; and so on. Many people do so, when they legally can, and often also when they legally cannot. Indeed, if we are to take seriously the notion of economic globalisation of markets, then this implies a globalisation of the so-called 'labour market', which immediately requires that 'labour' must be free to move wherever the best wages are to be found. That is, if we are to take seriously the present-day notion of economic globalisation, we must do away with the general prohibition on immigration into rich countries, as it exists today. We must allow the natural inclination of human beings to seek better lives to proceed. Every smiling, sliming, suited briefcased banker and economist and trade representative - every purveyor and every voyeur of corporate globalisation - must, if they are to be consistent, favour open borders, along with the hippies and the ferals. These consequences are rarely recognised in mainstream discussion of globalisation. But to do so would create a tendency for wage equalization between countries - as a single market - thereby thwarting the possibility for corporations to seek cheaper labour in the developing world. That is, the mainstream discussion of economic globalisation is discussed within a frame of reference which implicitly excludes the interests of the entire working population of the less-developed world - the vast majority of the human race.

These are the global parameters of everyday economic life are set. The world remains divided, as it has been for past centuries, between rich and poor, between North and South, and then into separate countries locked in competition. The unhindered ability of corporations and investors - that is, for *capital* - to move across borders is the major new characteristic of what is today called 'globalisation'. But the very existence of states, as geographic and sovereign entities, ensures that the freedom of *people* to move across borders, in search of a better life, is more restricted than ever. This is possibly the greatest hypocrisy of our time.

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The phenomena of everyday economic life which we are concerned with now are necessarily biased toward the developed world, and the West. We now focus on this region.

Geography and urban design. With modern agricultural methods, our economies are concentrated in cities, and therefore so are populations. But in the organisation of the way we live, there is total disconnection and alienation between people. In a small town all the inhabitants may know each other, and however stifling the social pressures that may arise, there is a guaranteed sense of community. The larger the town, the less there will necessarily be this sense of neighbourliness and community; in a modern metropolis, for all the swarming

crowds and streets choked with cars and people, there are very few connections between people. And there is no focal point for social interaction, or notion of shared experience; perhaps the best we have in this regard is television and sporting events. There is no sense of friendliness between the strangers on the street, no sense of solidarity or citizenship as a civic duty. Indeed, it is entirely possible to live in a city, and despite all our best efforts, really to know nobody else. There is tremendous loneliness, though of course this is necessarily hidden from the view of others.

It is clear, too, from the very geometry of our cities. Beyond the central business district we have vast, sprawling suburbs, parcelled into rectangular lots of single-family dwellings, occasionally apartments or flats. Nicely fenced off from our neighbours, it is rare that we ever get to know them; and the more fearful we are of each other, or of crime, or whatever other social illnesses, the less willing we are to approach and to embrace these strangers. Behind our picket fences we have our privacy, yes, but we are in another sense each prisoners behind them: not locked in, but locked out of the lives of others. And it is the same at work: the factories are in production lines; the skyscrapers are in cubes; the offices are in cubicles. Many, perhaps most, industries could not have been designed better for alienation and for disconnection.

Transport. Of all the absurdities of modern-day life, there is none more obvious than the methods of transport we use on an everyday basis. Home is far from work, yes, and we must travel in-between - and so is the case for everyone. Yet, instead of a large, integrated network of public transport, instead of some rational method of solving our shared transportation problems, instead we insist that transportation largely be carried on in individual vehicles, most of which carry precisely one person. The freeways are clogged, the streets are jammed, and the drivers are stressed. Looking at a choked freeway on an average weekday morning is dazzling in its inefficiency - how could a society possibly operate on the basis that the thousands of people who need to get from their homes, to the city, should each take up *that* much space, in *that* big a contraption, together grinding the city to a standstill, *every day*? The density of people on the freeway is so thin, and the freeway is so wide, that we would gasp, were it not so habitual. Miles of jammed freeway represent just a few train carriages! It is unbelievable that we tolerate it, for it frustrates and stresses us, it damages our disposition and mental health, and it unnecessarily pollutes our air. But apparently it is not 'economic' or not 'feasible' to build large-scale public transport systems. All of which suggests that something is horrendously flawed, in the way we have organised transport for ourselves, or our urban design, or both.

These are the local, physical parameters of our everyday economic life. The setup is not conducive to our happiness. At best it exacerbates the symptoms, and at worst it forms a major part of the problem. Next we turn to 'work'; and then to the notion of 'consumption'.

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The notion of work. It has been a fundamental, structural fact of human life that we have always had to work in order to survive. There may come a day when we are so technologically advanced that our entire economy is automated,

robots perform jobs, and we need not worry about work any longer; but that is surely a long way off, to the extent it is possible.

Or is it? Let us indulge our imaginations for a minute: we *are* quite advanced; a lot of our economy is mechanized, it *is* automated. At least, a great deal of the essential industries for our survival, like agriculture, manufacturing, and construction, are highly mechanized. And how much of our economy produces essential items, anyway, and how much of it produces unnecessary, or luxury items? What is a necessity, what is a convenience, and what is a luxury is in the eye of the beholder. But surely it is possible to live without a spa, or a fancy car, or a fancy stereo, or a fancy computer, or various appliances, or a DVD player, or an iPod, or even (horror of horrors!) a TV. We eat more food than we need; we have more clothes than we need; we have bigger houses than we need. And at the same time, we have unemployment; our politicians and economists tell us that a certain level of unemployment is inevitable.

These considerations lead us to a rather different sort of conception. If we were able to decide how much we really needed, or wanted, to buy and to consume, and it were less than is produced today, then the amount of work that needed to be done would obviously be less than today. Which means that we do *not* need to work as hard as we do today. And as our desires become more satisfied, and as these essential industries become more efficient, we will only need to work *less!* If we were serious about spreading work around, the currently unemployed could join in too, and reduce the average workload further! If we have 10% unemployment today, then the labour force would be multiplied by 10/9, and so the average working day would be reduced by 10% - immediately! By calibrating the system appropriately, making improvements, making innovations and so on - in brief, if we really *tried* - how short could we make the working day?

Throughout our history, and through to the present day, we have inherited a 'work ethic', descended from a 'work instinct', which is not universal but surely prevalent. The idea is that we have a duty to work; that not to work is lazy and morally repugnant; the notion that we all need to pitch in to help society function. In past ages those who did not work, or could not find work, were left to the charity of others, or to starve. In the last century or so the obvious immorality of leaving citizens to starve has been recognised, and the developed nations have all implemented social welfare systems, of varying thoroughness and generosity. (We are not concerned here with present-day controversies about the limitations and abuses of these systems - only briefly, below.) But the idea remains that there is a duty - even though it may not still be a physical necessity - to work.

So we might say: *the point of work is to contribute to society*; it is necessary, and it is our social duty. But on the other hand, do we really want to work if we can avoid it? And it is clear that to lighten the load of our toil, to spend more time at leisure, in exercise, in learning, with loved ones, and so on, is an obvious good. *The point of work is to eradicate it.*

Further, we might enquire as to what we actually do at work, and what this notion of work *ought* to involve. And surely, given a choice, we would prefer

more pleasant, more interesting work. There is an old idea of the 'dignity of labour': that our labour, in producing something, in a creative act, is an act of affirmation of our own lives. We might well snigger at the notion, especially if our work is unpleasant, rote or menial; but we would hopefully agree that we would prefer to perform other tasks than these; and those of us who do perform creative work surely do feel some pleasure in a good day's work, however much we might stop ourselves short of expressing it. Clearly, in making such comments we immediately jump on people's toes, we offend them; it is an emotional, not to mention a moral, minefield - more on this below. But this is another point of view: *the point of work is to create, and to enrich ourselves, in the fullest possible sense of the word*. Combined with the previous notion, we might arrive at: *the point of work is to eradicate unpleasant, rote and menial work, and to leave for ourselves creative and meaningful work*.

Taken together, I think these rather obvious comments are a good way to approach the whole notion of work. It is the obvious thing that people have to do for the society to survive from day to day; since it is necessary but perhaps not the favourite way to spend our time, we should like to minimise the time spent doing it, consistent with living at the level of luxury we wish; and when we do it, we would prefer it to be interesting. Hardly a profound set of observations. But how different this is from the typical approach to work! When we search for jobs, we hardly do so with our hearts bursting with civic duty! How many of us, when applying for a job, stop to ask how it contributes to society, whether it is beneficial, whether it is necessary, a luxury, or dead weight? And then, we perform nothing like a calculation of the level of luxury at which we would like to live, and then calibrate how hard or long we need to work accordingly, minimising the time worked - this idea is foreign to our experience. Even if we would like to, we cannot. Most of us don't have the luxury of choosing between jobs on the basis of high-minded social considerations. And even if we should like to perform the luxury/work-time calculation, we have no way to do it - most of us cannot adjust our hours that way; we take our job as given; and then we spend as much as we get. Some rich, talented, or highly qualified people can perhaps negotiate aspects of a job, or can pick and choose the position they like best, but for most people this is out of the question. Whether our work is interesting or not depends more on our talents, our inheritance (genetic, financial, and otherwise), and luck - and hence on our educational opportunities and our qualifications - rather than on choices that all people can consciously and freely make; and creative occupations are monopolised by some people, while rote or menial occupations are monopolised by others.

No, we do not speak of working, or of contributing to society, or calibrating our workload to our desired level of material comfort, or of enriching ourselves. Instead we speak of *needing* a job, whether as a material necessity, to avoid social embarrassment and humiliation, to escape poverty, or to provide for our children. We speak of *applying* for a job, that is, asking someone else to do with us as *they require*. We speak of *having an interview*, being *hired*, and *accepting* various tasks and responsibilities. It is not the language of a creative, self-determining, free agent. It is not the language of social duty and contribution.

And it does not evince the spirit of eradicating unnecessary toil. Indeed quite the opposite: work for someone else; do what they tell you; contribute to them. Yes, taking part in production of goods and services for society as much as anyone else, but just what power lies in the hands of this worker? What capacity has she to determine any of these very basic aspects of her work? If she is rich, or talented, or lucky, or attractive, or has had the opportunity for a high level education and qualification, then she may be able to obtain a more agreeable situation. But really, consider this language: for most, how different is it, from the language of a slave? - albeit, a slave that can reject one master for another, being unemployed in the interim.

And that leads us into very dangerous, treasonous, radical territory.

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*Listen to you! YOU would lecture ME?! Oh, I am a slave, am I?! You, you write overblown articles, you pretentious intellectuals, you think you can talk down to me like that? I already do my part. I have to deal with all the troubles of life: mortgage, job, family, bills, finding time for myself. You think we would all like to be authors, intellectuals like you? You think you've done a real day's work in your life? You live off our backs, we support you, and you treat us this way? If everybody just sat around pontificating like you, you think anything would get done? We would all be gone in a few days; nobody would know how to get anything done! You think you have the right to tell us how to run our lives? You think, just because I don't write learned articles, because I don't boss others around, that I am a vegetable? You think, just because I haven't spent my whole life in school, that you are superior? You think you know how the world works? Try getting a real job in the real world, try getting by *that* way, it's not easy. And I don't need you telling me what to do, or that I am an inferior person, a second-class intellectual citizen, for doing it. I can see it in your smile - is that a sneer? - your confidence; you have answers to everything; you've spent years perfecting it; but do you really think you are helping me? You intellectual missionaries, why should I even listen to you?*

So when I get a job, I don't think about contributing to society, and now I am a heartless bastard?! Because I need to get on in life - unlike you - I am in the wrong? We don't all need to satisfy our guilty consciences, like you! And no, I do not have the luxury of living a life of luxury by working less! What planet are you on? And no, I do not have one of your perfect 'empowering' jobs. Does that mean I am unfulfilled, does it? Does that mean I am incapable of participating in society? Does that mean I have been reduced to a sub-human? How dare you! And now you think - to top it all off - you think you can speak for me, describing me in your own language! *Stop patronising me!* Your arrogance is unbearable.

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Guilty as charged; but pleading for a light sentence. I can't begin to express how pretentious I feel at even beginning to write something on these topics, especially since I am pretentious at the best of times! To preach is to invite charges of hypocrisy. In discussing these matters, quite apart from what we say, we cannot avoid the fact that we are discussing them. The very fact that I can

think about and write about how daily life could or should be arranged implies that at present, daily life is arranged so that some people like me have time to think about these matters, while others including potential readers cannot. That is a highly unfortunate situation - it is itself a symptom of the problems that we are discussing. There is a whole background psychology to these discussions which permeates, perhaps only subconsciously, the way we think about them. Anyone who preaches is rightly assumed to be an embodiment of the virtue they espouse; and since they most likely do not, they are most likely pious, sanctimonious, self-righteous hypocrites. That I have decided to do it, to some extent, here - even though I have tried to present all this as 'facts and thoughts for you to think about' rather than 'the right way to do things' - does not mean that I wholeheartedly like doing it. But the author's self-conflict is not the interest here. The point is simply to note that there this underlying psychological dynamic exists - itself the product of inequality and injustice - and since it is often left unsaid, it is best to make it explicit so that we can reflect on it. In everyday life it is something of which we are (at least I am) all too well aware. If you have something you think is worth saying, even though it may exacerbate existing legitimate psychological sores, it may still be worth saying, especially if the point is to try to heal those sores. I have tried to emphasise at every stage the importance of looking beyond the level of the individual, to live beyond ourselves, to understand social institutions as the best way to understand how the world works. Hopefully the reader can view things in this light.

Get your hand off it! Enough navel-gazing, back to economics.

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Unemployment. In all our fine (or intolerably pretentious) talk about the potential nobility of work, and how we would like to reduce the burden of work, we are working under the assumption that we shall find pleasurable activities with which to fill our leisure time. We are assuming that unemployment - where there is no need for our work - would be a sort of utopia, a futuristic economic nirvana. But quite plainly that does not describe present-day unemployment very well.

Indeed, we see today just how debilitating and how painful unemployment is. It is humiliating to be fired from a job, or to be rejected in an application, or to be made to jump through hoops by the state to collect whatever unemployment benefits it provides. Ideological leaders, especially politicians, like to spread the image of the lazy dole bludger, or the 'welfare mom', abusing the system - politicians especially, so they can gain support for cutting funding to welfare programmes. Unemployment, they would have us believe, is synonymous with indolence, moral depravity, and illegitimate wealth.

Whatever we may think of the character of each individual unemployed person, there are a few facts which go unsaid. For one thing we must point out that whether we ought to have a social security system providing unemployment benefits is not an issue: the alternative is leaving the unemployed to starve, to rely on their friends and relatives, a return to the dark ages. The most minimal degree of civilization compels a society to say that no member will go without

sustenance; especially so when we see so much poverty around us. Further, some unemployment is obviously inevitable, for instance transitional unemployment of people between jobs, and the disabled. But it seems quite likely that a capitalist economic system such as ours *cannot exist without* unemployment in addition to this - at least if we wish to avoid inflation. It certainly appears so from recent history. The following economic explanation is standard: full employment would mean labour is scarce, so wages rise, hence prices rise to pay wages, and the inflation spiral begins. It is sobering to think that capitalist economic stability requires the existence of a reserve army of unemployed people, both to fill vacancies in new jobs, but also to bid down wages. The unemployed are humiliated not only by their position, not only by the ideological slander - and they must exist, they exist ineradicably as a target for humiliation - finally, they are humiliated as the institutional pit of humanity, at the bottom of the social scale, an institutionally springy pit which pushes back and stabilises wages.

One might think that, since unemployment must exist, it will be the least able, the most depraved, the most slothful, who take up this necessary station in society. That would reverse the causation in the ideological slander: one is not degenerate because they are unemployed; rather they are unemployed because they are degenerate. But even this is not true. As one obvious counterexample, we recall that much unemployment is among older people, laid off in corporate downsizing or restructuring, and unable to compete for jobs with an endless supply of younger, cheaper, more ambitious workers. We have no reason to say that those who find themselves unemployed are the lazy or least deserving ones. This is not to say that every unemployed person is a paragon of virtue; but it is to shift the focus from the individual, unemployed person, to the *system* itself, which creates this class of people, which exploits and humiliates them, and which cannot exist without them.

Unemployment in this context is very different from the sort of release from the burden of toil discussed above. That a capitalist economy cannot eradicate unemployment, and necessarily degrades the unemployed, is a black mark against it, a social outrage. If there were some way to guarantee full employment in a stable economic system, all other things being equal, we should certainly prefer it. With some method of sharing jobs between us - which is what we do in our domestic economy, and often in the individual workplace, for it is just common sense - we could obviate unemployment, and lower our own workload. This is the programme of a sane economic system, surely, and we may judge the insanity of present arrangements accordingly.

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The notion of consumption. People must work for a society to survive, but it is not enough just to produce a bunch of goods and services - for people to survive, they must use those goods and services. The process of obtaining and using these goods and services we call 'consumption'. *The point of consumption is to get what we need and want.* This is the obvious point, in any case.

Note that production and consumption certainly do not constitute everything in economics: it must be decided what to produce (the problem of *alloca-*

tion of resources); not all goods are for consumption (there is *investment* and *international trade* - I will not deal with international economics, which is too far from everyday life); not all consumption is done by individuals (where do, say, education, health services, lighthouses, swimming pools, roads and traffic lights fit in?); it must be decided which people get what is produced, and in what quantities (the problem of *distribution of income*); and there are all sorts of logistical problems in between. So many difficult questions! To survive we must solve them all simultaneously, in real time. To prosper we must also solve them well, consistently. Consumption is one end of the process, or if you like, one link in the chain.

If consumption is part of a broader social economic process, then deciding what we consume is not just a personal question, it has social consequences. What is consumed and what is produced are the same things, unless there are surpluses, investment and trade aside. Whatever we obtain for our own consumption, some other people working somewhere produced. Our actions and theirs are inextricably linked. In any functioning economy, there must be some relationship between what is produced and what is consumed. If not all needs are provided for, people suffer and die. Production, then, ought to tailor itself to people's needs and wants in consumption. *The point of work is to produce what people want to consume*: a fourth approach to 'work'. Really this is just the 'contribution to society' aspect of work, in a purely economic guise, and assuming that 'what people want to consume' is good for society. But if we have choices about what to consume, and production does react to what people want to consume, and production consists of people working, then those choices about consumption determine the nature of work. But we have already said that work ought to have certain desirable properties. Thus we might come up with another, reciprocal approach to consumption: *the point of consumption is to consume what people want to produce*; said another way, *the point of consumption is to determine work which is desirable*. That is, we ought to obtain those goods and services which are produced with desirable work. If we agree with our above analysis of work, that means work which is not arduous, not exploitative, creative, and empowering, as much as possible.

But what do we want? More importantly, *how do we decide what we want?* Clearly, in a sane economic system, we would review information about the available products, we would examine their cost. We have to work harder, or dip into our savings, or take out a loan, to buy more expensive items. We would weigh up what sort of work is required in producing these products. We would weigh up the costs (to us and other production workers) and the benefits (to us; we are discussing private purchases), and then we would decide appropriately.

Well then, how does consumption, as practiced today, compare to these notions? The first and most obvious point is that we have no way of knowing, without very difficult and arduous research - essentially without an exercise in investigative journalism - the working conditions under which goods and services are produced. We cannot find out information about pay or conditions; we sometimes cannot even find which country goods were produced in. We have no idea whether the work involved was interesting, how the production line works,

what the management practices are; *we know nothing*. In fact, we know less than nothing: the advertising and retail industries are arranged in such a way that we are systematically uninformed on these matters, and distracted by others. Retail stores are kept far away from the factories; salespeople usually would not know the first thing about the production process. Branding seeks to remove all humanity and social content from the product, reducing it to a logo, a slogan, and a Corporate Idea, such as a Nike swoosh. We may buy because we are familiar with the brand; because we wish to imitate or participate in the glory of the Corporate Idea. For the more socially aware, in the more egregious cases (such as Nike), the brand may convey to us all too well the working conditions involved in production - for all the wrong reasons.

Returning generally to consumption as practiced today, our pessimism is apparently not widely shared; indeed shopping is a widely celebrated and loved part of our culture. We have huge shopping centres and malls, vast networks of shops and stores, shops for every possible type of good and service, department stores with huge ranges of products! It's a consumer's dream! Provided we can afford it, we have few problems getting what we want.

The answers to our questions "What do we want?", and "How do we decide what we want?", in the present day, are made as follows. First there are necessities: we want these. We have said, though, that what is necessity is in the eye of the beholder - one could easily argue that a refrigerator, microwave, TV, radio, telephone, air conditioner or DVD player is a necessity today. But let us consider those desires which are not needs. How do we come to desire things? Perhaps by engaging in independent research, and there are consumers' associations for this purpose; perhaps by word of mouth, whether friends, or nagging children, strangers, anyone; these are reasonable enough. Perhaps simply by fancy; perhaps by social pressure to conform and to keep up with others: and although we would hardly condemn ourselves for the odd impulse purchase or for upgrading our video to a DVD player, when taken in the large and seen against a background of global poverty, hunger and suffering, we may doubt the reasonableness. But this neglects the most obvious determinant of our desires, namely:

Advertising and marketing. The point of advertising is to make people desire a good or service, so that they will buy or consume it. That is, the entire point of the advertising and marketing industries is to *create desires*. We must admit then that many consumption desires are artificially created: there are wants that would not exist, were it not for the efforts of the advertising industry to create them. It most certainly manipulates our desires, and we are all quite well aware that it rarely does so by rational argument; often by association, by image, by sexual suggestions, by building the notion of a 'brand'.

One certainly cannot argue that 'advertising', in the broadest possible sense, is illegitimate per se. Suppose a new good or service is invented and produced. In order to be consumed, people must know about it, and desire it. Without the publicity there will be no knowledge, no choice to consume, no desire, no consumption, and hence no production. Information and publicity about new products, then, is not only desirable, it is a necessity for an innovative economy.

But at least at present, the fraction of advertising which is devoted to honest, impartial, matter-of-fact publicity about new products is miniscule. They often advertise changes in price - sales - rather than new products. And they usually rely on all manner of psychological and emotional tricks to create desires within us. Sex sells, they say; image is everything; brands are powerful; logos and slogans are catchy and memorable; none of this gives us the slightest information about a product. Salespeople inform but pressure us to buy, wheal and deal. We are manipulated every step of the way, from the formation of desires, to the (usually meaningless) choice between brands and products, to the purchase. This vast industry - mostly consisting of deception and fraud - is devoted to creating artificial desires, to making us want unnecessary products, so that we will then 'freely choose' to buy them.

The logic of consumption. Not only are we manipulated to purchase and consume more goods and services: we must purchase sufficiently many of them; it is economic necessity. Our culture - approved by business, approved by advertising, approved even by government - is to spend frivolously on these goods. Indeed, such consumption is good for the economic system, because the system is insane. If we do not consume, then the work conditions we determine are *none at all* - for then there is nothing to produce. Thus, citizen consumer, the health of your fellow citizen worker is bound to you buying unnecessary items! Now, in a sane economy you might say: I don't need any more, and this is good, because I am satisfied, and in not demanding any more goods I am relieving others of part of their burden of toil! But, alas, that is not the case here. If the total demand is not high enough, then of course less will be produced: and in our economic system, this means layoffs, redundancies, downsizing, and closures. It means unemployment, suffering and misery. In this way, the health of our economic system is unavoidably tethered to overproduction and overconsumption, runaway economic output, and chronic materialism. But this is just another perspective on our previous discussion: in our system, less work means unemployment and suffering; whereas in a sane system, less work means more pleasure and enjoyment.

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Economic growth and GDP. Which brings us to a consideration of the total amount of goods and services produced by our economy. This is not so close to everyday life, admittedly; but it certainly affects all of the foregoing, as the above discussion demonstrates. We are told - it is the received wisdom - that things are going well or bad, and the economy is 'healthy' or not, accordingly as the total output we produce is high or low. If production decreases, it is so bad that it is a recession. If we produce more then we consume more, so we are apparently richer and more prosperous; regardless of the need for those goods, and regardless of the efforts expended in creating those goods, and in creating the desires for those goods. We have just seen that consuming less, apart from making us 'poorer' from the materialistic point of view, means producing and hence working less, which although possibly desirable in a sane economy, is disaster in our economic system.

We find ourselves, therefore, unthinkingly committed to economic growth,

by which we mean, not (as it might mean) growth in our skills and learning and reduction of working hours, but rather producing more goods and services. And this is a fine and noble goal, in a sense: with more wealth and more goods, we will avoid poverty, we will have more economic security, we will be able to provide for our family, we will be more comfortable, and so on. But we do not ask whether the economic growth comes at a cost to the quality of our lives, whether because we are working too hard or too long, or because we are using the extra wealth on superfluous objects, or because the newfound wealth is really to feed our addiction to artificially created desires. Nor do we ask how sustainable this growth is, or what destruction it causes to the environment. Nor do we ask how much of this growth goes to feeding immediate desires (both necessary and unnecessary), and how much goes to research and development, innovation and investment - sacrificing present consumption for future gain. Finally, nor do we decide how much of this growth in wealth goes to those who need it, and how much goes those who are well off already. In practice, and according to conventional wisdom, we applaud with enthusiasm proportionate to the increase in gross domestic product; when statistics arrive documenting poverty and inequality, we mumble some platitudes uneasily, possibly moralise a little, and then return to business as usual. Decisions as to investment are well beyond the everyday realm, and taken in the privacy of boardrooms or in state-funded initiatives; considerations of environmental effects are at best (and legally required to be) of second-order significance, behind profit and output, and depend on the vagaries of state regulation and the pressure applied by environmental NGOs. And all the decisions are far beyond the reach of popular participation. We shall have more to say about popular participation, and about the making of such decisions, as we proceed.

In any society, there are questions to be answered about how hard we want to work, how much we want to consume, how much we want to invest in the future, how much we want to protect the environment, and how income will be distributed. In any sane society, the question as to how much we should produce would be answered by somehow weighing these sets of data up against each other and arriving at a balance between them. The answer that we give in practice today - more is always better - is insane on minimal grounds: because the earth is finite in its resources, and we cannot go on increasing production indefinitely.

In fact, we have the questions the wrong way around. We ought to look at the distribution of working hours and conditions, at the distribution of income and consumption and desires, at the environmental resource situation, and at our thoughts and desires and prospects for the future - and *then* decide on economic output. Our individual and social desires, the conditions which affect us in our everyday lives: these are the questions which matter; and that is why I have dealt with such 'everyday' matters first here. And they are relevant to *us*, to *people*, not to businesses and corporations. Since we, as workers and as consumers, are the actual inhabitants of our society, it is our wellbeing - in the broad, not just materialistic, sense of the word - which should be taken into primary account, along with that of future generations to whom we cannot bequeath

a dead planet. The level of economic production and GDP, and the question of economic growth, is secondary. If we answer the primary considerations correctly, it is not only secondary: it is then *irrelevant*, for it will automatically be set at an appropriate level.

There is an arsenal of conventional platitudes in reply, of course: a rising tide lifts all boats; economic growth benefits all, both rich and poor gain from it, in the narrow material sense. And of course this is usually true, though the wealth of the rich usually increases at least as fast as the poor. The conventional argument is that this is the easiest, and the least disruptive way to ease poverty. But in addition to the answer being insane on minimal grounds, we note the following point: it is easier to commit ourselves to the course of neverending runaway production, than it is to attempt any redistribution from the rich to the poor. The interests, the influence - in short, the *power* of the rich - is too much. Though, if we stopped to think about it, we might decide - yes! this is enough, we have enough now, just spread it around and we shall all be happy. But no, we remove from ourselves the possibility of thinking such thoughts, with our unthinking commitment to economic growth, and to GDP per capita as the measure of social progress.

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Income distribution. We may well talk about economic growth as a solution to poverty; and the understanding then is that the problem of income distribution is too difficult. We may well see the commitment of all mainstream political parties and economic doctrines to economic growth as the outcome of a truce in the argument of income distribution.¹ We may say that Left and Right agreed, that neither would try to redistribute too severely, to bury the hatchet of distributional politics, and rather aim for growth making them all richer, but leaving inequality as it is, to fester, to deteriorate. But we are not here concerned with the truces of mainstream politics and papering over issues just because they are considered controversial; we want to understand matters.

But though it is difficult, it is a question we cannot ignore: how ought income be distributed? How much ought people to be paid? It is a dangerous, explosive, offensive question, removed from polite conversation; it is a simmering stew of anger, indignant possessiveness, injustice and righteousness. It is cooled by the necessity to live with our neighbours, by the obvious observation that those who are richer or poorer than us are rarely bad people, by the evolution of social norms and manners which systematically avoid the issue. But even then, though submerged, it still burns; it is a chief cause of the resentments, the missed opportunities, the unfulfilled lives, that we live today, watching the fulfilled lives of others. It regularly boils over around the world, finding outlets in violence, whether directly against economic injustice, or indirectly against related social ills such as police violence, racial tensions, drug trafficking, or gang wars.

We all know that many people do hardly any work and earn more in an hour than we earn in a day, week, month or even year; we all know that many

¹See the argument to this effect in Galbraith's *The Affluent Society*.

people work hard all their lives and struggle to make ends meet. We may not care so much whether our neighbour earns a little more or little less; indeed to care too much about such things would likely consume us immediately in petty jealousies and intricate, irrelevant accounting of debits and credits and rights and wrongs. But we cannot ignore the problem, between the extremes in our society - and we can barely fathom the distance between the extremely rich and the extremely poor nations of the world. It moves us to tears; it is intolerable.

Dare we ask? If we were to sit down with our fellow citizens and answer the question as to how much each profession was worth, our debate would know no end. Should a taxi driver earn more than a crane driver? Should a doctor earn more than a pilot? It is a Pandora's box; it is not a question to decide by discussion; it is a question to be answered by social processes, by the institutions operating in society. In contemporary society the relative wages are determined by such an institution, namely the labour market. We already discussed how the labour market decides that the labour of third world workers - the most impoverished, the most needy - are worth a miniscule fraction of unskilled labour in the developed world. But let us once more - as a stronger case - examine the situation within a single 'developed' economy, and how the market sets the wage levels there.

The market, in all its sagacity, decides the matter as follows. The highly skilled professional who stays on at school, goes through university, and obtains a comfortable professional position performing largely intellectual work in an air-conditioned office, is highly paid. The unskilled worker, on the other hand, leaves school early; forgoes the pleasure - dare we say, dalliance? - of attending university; and performs manual labour, more likely to be uninteresting, repetitive, and rote; more likely to be unpleasant. She forgoes all the pleasures and the comforts of the educated, professional life; she exerts herself much more vigorously, at least in a physical sense, and probably generally; her life path, possibly the raising of a family and large-scale purchases such as a house, are beset with difficulty and stress; her career path, her prospects for improvement, are not great; her manager, after all, is most likely a highly educated professional. So, for all the extra comfort she has foregone, for all the workload she endures, for all the extra effort she expends, for all the opportunities which pass her by, how is she compensated, for all this, in wages? How much more highly paid should she be than the cushy desk-based professional, (not that there is anything wrong with working as a professional at a desk!) in order to remedy the deficit in her opportunities and the surplus in her efforts? We all know the answer: she is compensated with an economic slap in the face, with *lower* wages, with the wrong answer, with a perverse answer, with an insane answer. If there were any justice in the market, it would at least reward the opportunities foregone and effort expended; the answer would be at least as high as for the comfortable professional. But it does not, because the price of this labour is low; it comes in high supply, and there is the reserve army of unemployed to bid the price down. Market prices, as applied to human labour, give inadequate and perverse answers.

This does not answer the question - nor does it even begin the criticism of

the market - and there are several principles on which we might say income distribution ought to be based. Shall we proclaim, with obvious justice: "From each according to his ability, to each according to his need!"² Shall we say, instead, as implicitly assumed above: "more effort, more pay!"? Or shall we conclude the question is too difficult, and rather declare: "equal pay for all!"? Perhaps we should modify this slightly, since some people will still want to work longer or shorter hours: "equal pay per hour for all!" There are arguments in favour of each of these, and each has its shortcomings. It is an important political discussion, which here I do not propose to answer fully. It is important to note, however, that such questions do not enter the spectrum of possible mainstream debate.

Suffice it here to make the following comments. To me it seems that equal pay fails to take account of differences between types of labour, some of which are clearly more arduous than others. One might try to balance out and rotate jobs, so that they roughly involve equal effort, are roughly equally pleasurable, and roughly equally menial - indeed there are other arguments for this balancing of jobs (which are no longer jobs in the usual sense of the word, rather 'job complexes') - but then, we are rewarding according to 'effort' anyway. Payment according to need is clearly laudable, but when strict physical needs such as food and shelter are provided for, payment according to need depends on what we think a need is - and we somehow have to decide what a need is. Things then become problematic; though this certainly seems like a good approach, say, to provision of medical services. Payment according to effort, to me at least, seems like the most plausible, most reasonable, most workable option. And it seems fair - though we need not have precise measures of effort - as if 'effort' could be measured scientifically! If we balance jobs (or 'job complexes'), then payment is equal anyway; and we need not (and cannot) be too precise in this balancing. If we cannot balance even approximately, then the work with greater effort deserves greater pay. Note that mainstream economists would be sure to raise questions of incentives at this point: I do not; I am interested in what we think is fair and reasonable, not interested in treating humans as donkeys to be goaded by a carrot and whipped with a stick. Incentives are a second-order consideration, to be examined once we have decided our guiding principles. For those seriously interested in the question, these initial considerations - approximately the antithesis of mainstream economic doctrine - throw up a thousand important questions, including those just mentioned regarding incentives, which all deserve our consideration in formulating a decent economic system. They are beyond my scope for the time being: for now, it is sufficient to note that by whatever criterion we prefer, the present system fails miserably.

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Allocation and misallocation; investment and research. This leads us into quite general and abstract considerations of how resources are allocated in our economy. We very briefly discussed the allocation of income to individual work-

²Most Americans see this as such an obvious statement of fairness that they think it is a quote from the US constitution; in fact, it is from the Communist Manifesto.

ers above; and we have discussed how resources are allocated to the production of unnecessary products via advertising's corrupting of preferences. But still there is more to allocation.

For instance, we may consider state spending, particularly on the military. Somehow, although times are always tough for state-funded hospitals, universities and schools, and budgets there have to be cut, somehow there is always more funding available for military projects. Through the Cold War, spending on all manner of military projects - from nuclear stockpiles to space technology, from propaganda battles to proxy wars - was a massive part of the economy of the superpowers and their allies. Each accelerated the other with fits of provocation, deception, false panic and brinkmanship, in a race of insane economic allocation. Even after the end of the Cold War, despite the virtual absence of threats to the Western world after the end of the Cold War, military spending did not decline in any extreme fashion, and then began to increase again, remaining at incredible levels - levels which were given great excuse to multiply after the terrorist attacks of September 2001. But it is not only the large countries; the global arms trade is an extraordinarily prolific business, supplying much of the world - especially impoverished parts of the world - with weapons to continue the ongoing fratricidal battles there. We have never really found a way to reduce our military expenditures: rather, the increases of nations cause others to increase, and it can only be done unilaterally, at great risk. The USSR did so in the 1980s, but that is an isolated case on the brink of bankruptcy. The logic of the state is, as a first priority, defence; and so it spends, even though such spending exacerbates the fears, and the risks, of others. We may certainly ask whether such an allocation process is rational, and whether a world driven by its own processes continually to stockpile arms - even given the hungry, impoverished, and repressed state of the world, and even as basic health and welfare systems in the developed world are under perpetual stress - can be considered even minimally sane.

On a smaller scale, when we ask about allocation for investment, how does this come about? How are new workplaces, new businesses, founded, and how are their start-up costs borne? How are decisions to invest in existing workplaces, to expand and improve existing facilities, made? They are, of course, usually made by private investors, by banks, by large corporations, by venture capitalists, by wealthy individuals. And by what criteria do they choose to invest? We might ask how they weigh up the potential risks and benefits of a new project; how it will benefit society; how it caters to existing needs; how arduous or stressful the work is likely to be for those who work there; what will be its environmental impact; what will be the consequences for workers if its product is not wanted, and not consumed, and the project fails; and how urgent the project is, in relation to other proposals for social and economic development. And the answer is, none of these criteria are addressed. The primary consideration is the return on investment, the amount of profit the project is likely to generate, and its viability, in this most narrow and perverse sense. Projects are prioritised according to their expected return, though of course there are distinctions made between 'high risk high return' and 'low risk low return' in-

vestments, and between selling shares (equity) or taking loans. The social cost or benefit is irrelevant, except insofar as it impacts on the bottom line - that is, private costs and benefits, short-range costs and benefits, only. Environmental effects are irrelevant, except where there are government regulations, viewed as a hindrance. And consideration for the lives of the workers at this project is so far from consideration that it does not register; except perhaps that a unionised workforce will be viewed as a source of higher labour costs and a general hindrance. Certainly, the obvious consideration that such investment is unearned income for the investor, without expending any effort - and therefore doubtfully legitimate according to the above discussion - will not raise a mention.

As for trading of shares themselves, we have the well-established institution of the share market, and the stock exchange. This is no longer investing in new projects; rather the idea is purely unearned income, by buying shares which increase in price; in short, it is gambling. And we might well consider gambling as a laugh, except that here the gambling is with shares in companies where real people work, and a company whose share price declines, whose equity declines, whose financial position declines, will be nothing but a source of misery to its workforce. Unlike gambling at a traditional casino, where the losers are isolated individuals, the potential losers in this casino are entire workplaces, indeed entire segments of the economy. That it has slightly better odds than a traditional casino makes it more lucrative, and more pleasurable in a purely selfish sense. But it is hard to find a more flagrant example of social responsibility forgotten and conquered by selfish possessiveness.

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Democracy. We will notice, that in all of our discussions about how production, consumption, allocation and investment, the place for everyday people, the place for a say in our own lives is very limited indeed. At work, unless we happen to be a manager, we take orders, though in taking initiative in following those orders - for greater enthusiasm in our subservience - we are often rewarded. Even if we happen to be a manager, we take orders from stockholders, and cannot fail to deliver a 'healthy' profit and return to investors, regardless of how healthy that result is for the workforce or the environment. In our consumption we buy things we would not otherwise want, and we are ruthlessly manipulated by the whole industry of advertising. In allocation, decisions are left to private investors with a sole eye for profit. There is now sometimes profit to be made by banks and superannuation funds and stockbrokers, from investors who would prefer not to see totally egregious exploitation, and hence we now speak approvingly of 'ethical investment' - even though all investment is unearned income, and all investment is based on profit and return. If we ourselves invest, our choices are already constrained: we must already be sufficiently wealthy, and however ethical we want to think ourselves, it still makes no sense to invest in unprofitable companies; the gambling only works with respect to the most profitable ones. And even the government - in democratic states, supposed to be accountable to the public - makes decisions based on its assessment of the state's situation, far from popular consideration and accountability, far from electoral issues: hence a neverending supply of arms and weapons and a continual strain

on essential public services, though there may be some variation between the political brands, at least in their marketing.

In short: although we in apparently democratic states may claim to have some power over the decision-making processes in our society - and we certainly have some, perhaps minimal, say in government - when it comes to the economic system, we have virtually none. Most of the important economic decisions are made in private, by large corporations, hidden from public view and immune to public accountability. Even those we thought we had some say in - our shopping and consumption - are manipulated every step of the way. And our work, the place we spend much of our waking lives, is rarely democratic in the slightest, bound in hierarchy, papered over by 'human resource management', justified by reverence to authority, and duping the workforce with promises of advancement and ladder-climbing, fighting between each other and stepping on each others toes, in a supposed meritocracy. We may call it a democracy; but for the most part of our lives, and especially the economic part, our society is no such thing. It is unfortunate then, that the system is also insane.

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It is nothing new, to argue that our economic system is insane. That has been well-known since at least the 19th century, and forcefully argued regularly since then. We know so much from our everyday life; perhaps our insane habits are so regular that we do not always recognised the degree of ridicule they should invite, but we see enough expressions of despair and powerlessness in our culture that we know something has to give. Everything is wrong; everything is getting worse. The point is to change it; the first step is realising what is wrong, where, and how.