Desire-Value and the Pleasure Tendency

TWO ESSAYS
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further theses: 1

Contents

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On the proposition that 'Upon the end of all commodities, the pleasure tendency alone would be sufficient to ensure the satisfaction of all need'.

The pleasure tendency is defined as that expression of the pleasure principle whereby the fulfillment of desire is pursued in a direct and unmediated manner and in a manner which recognises the social interdependence between such a principle and the pleasure principle of other individuals. My thesis is that the pleasure tendency of a society is the combination of each individual following their own pleasure tendency, and that this relationship holds for each individual in respect of a group, each group in respect of each society and each society in respect of the world.

Three questions are raised:

1. What is the detailed operation of the pleasure tendency?
2. What are its advantages over other principles?
3. To what extent is it likely to gain widespread acceptance?

PART I

The accepted view is that if every individual was left to do entirely as they pleased, not only would there be 'anarchy', in the sense of an end to morals and ensuing chaotic violence and intimidation; but all would be reduced to a level of grim poverty as each served only their immediate interests and socialised productive work ceased. The only mitigation of this would be in activity carried out in charity. The imperative of need, acting upon a human nature which is basically lazy and greedy, would eventually give rise either to an authoritarian feudal state or a free market economy.

A truer account would be that these two systems, and the many others based on economies, give rise to these modes of behaviour, which are in contradiction to human nature. It is true that left to themselves, individuals do what is most pleasurable to themselves; but it is also true to say that individuals as a whole do what is most pleasurable to themselves as a whole. Individuals benefit from being part of a larger unit which trades off likes against dislikes, aptitudes against their absence, and unpleasant tasks against the need for them to be done. But the pleasure tendency is more than pragmatic self-interest or Utilitarianism. It is the interaction of the needs and desires immediately known to an individual as their own, with the needs and desires of others, communicated to him or her indirectly. However, this is not a principle which involves the sacrifice of the individual's gratification at the gain of another; indeed, sacrifice positively will not do.

Consider the example of lovers. In this case, an injury to one is an injury to both. In many respects they share the same interests. He, for instance, does what is pleasurable for her because her pleasure is his. Not in the literal sense, notice, for they must be distinct in a way which would make sense of their being brought together. In pleasing her he is pursuing his own pleasure as surely as when simply pleasing himself. Neither is afraid, either, to simply please themselves, as this is also pleasure for the other. In this case, reciprocity means that the total pleasure of both is maximised by each pursuing their own individual pleasure.

However, this neat arrangement depends on its stability on honesty. The intrusion of sacrifice on the part of any party undermines the basis on which the interests of both are served. To willingly serve another's pleasure is, in this admittedly paradigm case, to serve one's own, but to tolerate suffering which is not cancelled out by the other's pleasure is to not participate in that reciprical act which itself constitutes a condition of that pleasure. There is no enjoyment in enjoying what is given at the expense of another's suffering. This leads, in the case of the honourable person, only to guilt and an insidious binding obligation; in the dishonourable person, to carefree enjoyment which is dependent on another's lack of it. By definition, the sacrificing party cannot 'enjoy sacrifice', otherwise there would be no sacrifice, or no enjoyment. The two-way arrangement has broken down, and neither gets any benefit. The only obligation, therefore, on lovers is to do only what they individually enjoy.

The preceding paragraphs have been an attempt, not to describe a completely new rule of action, but to analyse the rules of a principle which is already in limited use. It is important to remember in what comes later that the only thing which is new is the attempt to extend this principle from the sphere of personal relations to the impersonal. In the impersonal sphere, reciprocity takes much less of a prominent place, although it is present, and the conditions of freedom coupled with honesty facilitates the free trading of reluctance for willingness.

That which has reference to lovers refers also to families, or should do. But what is more like the case of the outside world is that of groups of friends. If the choice of members is right, the enjoyment of one is the enjoyment of all. In an expedition or activity, if the pleasure tendency is allowed free rein, it is the privilege of each to do what they wish, and for the remainder of the tasks, if there are any, to be divided up fairly. One will wish to chop the wood, another to light the fire, another to erect the tent and the other two to go off on a secluded walk to fetch the milk. The others may have a wry grin to themselves at the unspoken agreement which allowed the two to slope off and for another to make the tea because he enjoyed cooking, even though he may not be a good cook. For the maximisation of the enjoyment of each, it is essential that there be no fixed duties or rota, but also that everyone is honest about what they want to do. The principle of equality means not that everyone be treated the same, but that inequalities be fairly treated.

Reluctance is a valid disposition which it is important is communicated in order that a disposition of willingness on the part of another person is allowed fulfilment. Anything which inhibits the expression of these dispositions - and the sacrificial tendency inhibits the expression of both - will lead to people doing what they do not wish to and not doing what they wish to. The exchange of likes and dislikes can only be made efficient if all are, as it were, selfish. Of course, other limitations and frictions are placed on this exchange by constraining influences in the social and political system. The reluctance people feel towards pleasing themselves and satisfying their own desires is, as we shall see, part of a wider apparatus of control and exploitation.

The example of the good-humoured toleration and collectivity of friends and family is included to show that human beings in their free state are capable of organising in number for the maximum benefit of all within a principle of freedom of action. In order to show that society on a larger scale could organise itself on similar lines it will be necessary to disprove what might be called the 'myth of self indulgence'. This is, that if everyone did simply what pleased them, society as a whole could not sustain itself at more than subsistence level, and would in addition slip into a state of barbarism.

The myth rests foremost on the assumption that without some system of reward or inducement no one would perform any useful activity. The exceptions to this rule are so out of the ordinary that they are given a special name: Charity, whose meaning depends on its being a virtue, which is so, precisely because it is so rare. Charity will not perform the duty of a new engine of social production; it could not become the rule as its sense is dependent on it being an exception to the rule.

It is an almost universally accepted truth that anything done for others is a drag, thus to be avoided. This truth, however, is an instrument of a financial system acting on its instinct for self-preservation. For if it were not so that, say, fashioning useful objects was not enjoyable, production and distribution would occur without the need for the intermediary of money, and the financial system and all it entails would be redundant. Work has by necessity to be unpleasant in a commodity economy in order that money may enter circulation as an incentive; there is no need for an incentive to do what is pleasurable, so work has to be made unpleasant. Money can be seen as having a life of its own, and itself demands the aversion which is commonly felt to work.

There is another manifestation of this instinct for self-preservation in money; it desires faster and faster circulation of itself in ever greater quantities. It creates, therefore, ever greater quantities of objects of increasing complexity and shorter life. There is an ever faster velocity of apparent change, while the life of the spirit stagnates or even withers. False needs provide false incentives (while real needs are neglected), which gives rise to the contradiction that while there is an ever increasing apparent affluence, compensations become ever more trivial, unsatisfying and hence compulsively necessary. What is more, Capitalism is driven into crisis because of the contradiction between the microeconomic need to minimise wage costs and the macroeconomic need to maximise buying power

The idea of productive effort as unpleasant is a fiction for the convenience of the commodity economy in another way too. It is necessary in a commodity economy, that nothing be done which is not for reward; therefore, whatever does not bring a reward is not in the interest of the self. Moreover, whatever is profitable to the (legal) person is deemed, by market criteria, to be worth continuing. It is, nevertheless, far from clear that this is a realistic or useful criteria for what is worth doing. One only has to look at the state of the world today, and the atrocities perpetrated in the name of the commodity, to realise that. Why should it be thought that a single blind force could accurately reflect real values, efficiencies and benefits, any more than it should be thought that a single planning agency could omnipotently know and plan everything? There seems, on the contrary, little evidence that actions and conditions determined by the commodity bear any relationship with what a common-sense approach would recommend.

In fact, the real truth - that efficient productive activity is one of the whole range of activities which are pleasurable - cannot be suppressed. It must be allowed to exist side by side with the play-life, and kept to well-defined limits, in order that it appear less subversive. I refer to what the financial mind can only know by such names as Charity, foolishness, friendship or the amateur passion.

With the amateur passion we have strong evidence that there exists an aspect of self-indulgence which is not purely self-centred. These are pursuits carried on not for any profit but for the inherent satisfaction they bring. The fact that much of the final product of these activities is directed towards the public plays a vital part in its enjoyment. The motives are those such as respect, acclaim, thanks or just pleasure in seeing other

people made happy by creations of one's own. It comes down to a validation of one's identity as social and human by participating in the life of others, by an act of creation for others. The work of Alexander Thom, who developed widely respected mathematical theories about megalithic structures largely after retirement, is a remarkable example in a field where there is still some room left for the amateur. The efforts of the renovators of steam engines and their lines is another, although they are admittedly forced to make some charges to cover costs. We are fortunate in this country still to be blessed with an army of model engineers, gardeners, brewers and the like who have not yet succumbed to the more passive pastimes of the consumer society, or been drafted into the ranks of the 'leisure industry'.

But the real situation does not lurk just with the hobbyists. What entrepreneur, manufacturer or professional is there who does not declare tht they find satisfaction in their vocation regardless of remuneration - indeed, sometimes in spite of it? Still, the final justification of work often resides outside the financial framework of business in which it is conducted.

In a similar way, the working class worker works often in spite of the institution which apparently maintains that work. He or she has first to overcome the alienation, the desire to just not turn up again, which is the inevitable corollary of commodity labour. The worker must fight the generic unpleasantness of work in order to gain some of that satisfaction, which they understandably crave, of being part of the combined productive effort of the factory and the country.

I have outlined why I think that the pleasure tendency is the natural way in which society should organise itself, but that it is shackled to pointless work and the over-consumption of trivia by the economy. Now I propose to sketch some of the practical ways in which the pleasure tendency would operate.

There would be a sharp fall in the work necessary, due to:

a) The cessation of false needs.

b) The rediscovery of quality and the elimination of superfluity in produced goods.

c) The increased life of goods.

d) The economies which deregulation and the unleashing of creativity and technology would bring.

There would be a sharp decline in the amount of unpleasant work to do, due to:

a) The fact of its not being carried out.

b) The resultant invention of ways to circumvent the need for it.

c) The re-alignment of priorities such that those requiring unpleasant tasks are the least important.

d) The free exchange of likes for dislikes.

I think it possible that given d) above, there would be no one doing what they did not enjoy, save in the course of pursuing a larger project which they were enjoying as a whole; in which case, it would be equally truthful to say that they were not not enjoying it.

The matching of demand to supply and supply to demand, and the co-ordination of resources and effort would be effected in the following ways:

a) The distribution of inherently rare goods by a fair means agreed upon by an assembly of all interested people.

b) The communication of general desires throughout the population by similar means to those employed now: media, word of mouth and the rate at which the goods produced are consumed.

c) The right of people to organise freely for the satisfaction of

demands and the freedom from coercion for the same purpose.

There remains the question of behaviour, or barbarism. It is important to remember that those who control today's society have an interest in maintaining the belief that civil society is only maintained by threats. They have an interest also, therefore, in encouraging violence and crime, as they do by the culture of violent and amoral books and films, in order to frighten the populace by the thought of 'uncontrolled' life and make people grateful for the selective justice they hand out. The state apparatus is there, in part, to enforce good and bad behaviour; since it wishes to guarantee its continued existence, it must encourage the ebbing of the categorical imperative to do what is right irrespective of reward or coercion.

Because I argue for the categorical imperative does not mean, however, that I do not recognise that it is the expressed displeasure of a person in reaction to an action by another which is the sole determinant of the meaning of 'right' and 'wrong'. And that that displeasure may extend to violence.

Civil behaviour would tend to be the case because;

a) Courts would inevitably arise at the general assembly. A larger general assembly of interest would have authority over a smaller general assembly of the same interest.

b) There would be a right to retaliation.

c) Honour would be re-established.

d) The fostered amoralism of today's decadent society would cease.

e) There would be an end to the frustrating conditions of life, its impotence, mediocrity and lack of greatness which is (because these are the true conditions of life, driven underground and inverted) the cause of so much gratuitous violence (which is the inversion of life).

PART II

What advantages does the pleasure tendency have over other rules?

To those who would say that the rule of monetary self-interest is the most rational reason to satisfy a demand, I would ask; what could be more rational a reason to satisfy a demand than <u>because it is there?</u> And what greater guarantee that supply could never exceed demand? Or that demand will be satisfied? No one shall lose a livelihood if demand shrinks, and there need not be the tendency which we see in an economy of abundance to artificially inflate demand. There will be the even greater incentive to cease production than that provided by shrinking revenues, that of the disinclination to do something which is useless, one which is also less destructive to those to whom the incentive applies.

It is an important advantage that the pleasure tendency has that it is a direct relationship between demand and supply, whereas in the commodity system demand and supply are mediated - in an indirect relationship - by the commodity. There is the interposition of a mediatory reason, namely profit, where it is <u>not</u> shown that:

a) Worthy demands are profitable.

b) Profitable demands are worth satisfying.

c) Profitability is a good reflection of the state of need or the rational deployment of goods.

d) The profit system does not take on a life of its own, supplying the rationale and the requirement to service it as a seperate entity.

e) That the profit ethic does not structurally entail the creation of false needs, because the satisfaction of needs is just the instrument of the overriding project of amassing wealth, and not an end in itself.

f) That a mediatory reason is a good moral principle.

g) That commodity labour has the effect of reducing the need for labour.

h) That the profit system does not require a vast army of bureaucrats, planners and police to make it work.

Taking the provision of pleasure, or the satisfaction of need, as an end in itself, eliminates the ethic which is the rationale behind the many rip-offs of ordinary crime, and the falsification of desire which is Capitalist crime.

The crucial part of this argument is that if the defender of the rule of monetary self-interest admits, as they might, that this self-interest rule operates in order to allow the pleasure tendency to operate on another level, then the question of why have the rule of self-interest at all begs to be answered.

The competing rules of social life could be said to be these:

i) After all commodities are abolished, the pleasure tendency is alone sufficient to ensure the satisfaction of all need.

ii) Each 'legal person' is to do what is most profitable to itself, within the constraints composed by the law. This alone is sufficient to ensure the satisfaction of all need.

iii) From each according to their abilities, to each according to their need.

iv) The common good, and hence the individual good and the satisfaction of all needs, is served by the conformance of the individual to the will of the people, expressed either by the dictatorship of the proletariat or the Soviets.

Again, we have said elsewhere (Dull Reflection, memos MSPT 2,5,11,12,13,14,15,17,18(I & II),20, PTSB 3) why we think that that which is experienced as a commodity is an experience defiled, and why the commodity is destined to spread in the market economy. So much for the profit motive, rule (ii).

As for rule (iii), it is fine as far as it goes, but gives no indication as to the principle under which abilities are to be taken from each individual, or how 'need' is to be evaluated, if at all.

Rule (iv) is the model for the old 'Bureaucratic Socialism' version of society. It refuses to recognise the fact that no single committee or body of people can possibly know all the facts it would need to plan all the movements of all things in a whole country. It refuses to recognise the fact that the expression of individual wills as a mass and the cumulative effect of many small freely taken choices is the only true expression of the will of the people. It is difficult to see how a rule which is meant to satisfy the individual can ask that no individual gets what they really wanted. Neither is this rule, as the example of the U.S.S.R. shows, incompatible with the commodity and a miserable state of life.

Perhaps the biggest single drawback of the market as an economic system is that it does not reflect major diseconomies which are nevertheless obvious to common sense. For instance, the way in which we presently make motor cars is patently irrational. Hundreds of thousands of people toil constantly to create chassis, engines, bodies etc. which are discarded at close to the same rate that they are produced. Any increase in production capacity must be matched by a decrease in product life. There is no incentive to increase the life of a car, indeed, it would be financial madness to do so. In a rational system, the incentive would be to produce cars faster than they are scrapped, creating an accumulation of vehicles and steadily decreasing the work required in society. A small increase in effort could surely extend the useful life of

a car tenfold. In a pleasure tendency economy, building a car would be like building a house; an almost once-and-for-all affair, not, as it is at present, the consignment of another fudged attempt at perfection to the maw in order to satisfy planned obsolescence.

The macroeconomic need for the purchasing power of the consumer force to be maintained creates the situation where, in order to compensate for technological advance and the contraction of real work necessary in society, new forms of waged labour - and more trivial commodities as its product - must be continually created. Since it is inconceivable to the commodity economy, as the ruling power of today's society, that it should not survive and grow in extent, mere people (as pieces in its giant boardgame) must be made to move its demands either at the production end or the consumption end.

Other diseconomies are incapable of representation by 'market price'. For instance, the foolishness of consuming resources of ores in the wasteful way we do is not communicated to us by the market price of these ores. Yet anyone can see that it would be sensible to start conserving them now. Likewise, the market price of a vehicle does not reflect the fact that the effort would be better expended in producing less cars of a higher quality, and that the people who produce them are shackled needlessly to the misery of a humdrum and alienating productive life.

Another example of the failure of market forces to reflect true efficiencies can be seen in national transport policy. Transport by road continues to be the cheapest method for many goods, while the inherent efficiencies of canal and rail transport are obvious. Instead of a large vehicle with one engine and one driver running on low-friction steel rails and wheels, we have many small vehicles with many engines and drivers running on high-friction rubber and tarmac. One train can carry as much as ten juggernauts. What is more, these juggernauts run through our towns and cities causing immense damage to human beings, roads, buildings and the quality of life.

Canals could have efficiences beyond that even of railways. Yet this fact is not represented to us in the commodity economy. Canals are uneconomic today because speed of transport is necessary to minimise the capital tied up in transit. This fact has no bearing on the real efficiences involved. The road transport industry receives an immense 'hidden subsidy' from the rest of us. Need it be said that in the rubber, motor, oil and construction industries are some of the most successful and powerful companies, employing millions of people? The present organisation of transport and many other sectors is aimed at maintaining substantially higher consumption and labour needs than is necessary.

In any system which claims to be truly economic, all goods ought to be transported in the most efficient way. There is no reason why compact high-value products should not be transported by the same means as bulky low-value ones. At the moment, abstract reasons of capital liquidity intervene to make this impossible.

It may be objected that there can be no concept of efficiency itself without the intercomparable index of price. Price provides the sole means by which unlike products can be likened. What is the most efficient way if there is no single measure of 'cost'?

Well, it would surely be wrong to maintain that we do not have at our disposal ways of comparing things which have no recourse to price. The point of purchase itself is partly to allow us precisely to be free to make choices in these other ways. We do not have to obey the rules of the economy in our personal lives, and nor would most people wish to. We make those choices on

the basis of direct appraisal of the facts, like how much of a particular thing we have, or how much labour is involved or was involved. And the social human being has no difficulty in making as part of his evaluative apparatus those wishes and desires of society which are communicated to him through others. We try to use least of what is in short supply. We strive to supply what is most scarce. Most people, we can be sure, would say that the post should be carried by road and rail rather than by canal.

One thing that the commodity economy has time and again demonstrated itself to be incapable of observing is moral values. We see in our present time the way in which some part of the population has inevitably to be impoverished within the system. It must also take responsibility for the more unpleasant side of crime and the pornography industry. Further back in history we must lament the destruction of thousands of proud and fine peoples and cultures in the 'necessary' expansion of Europe.

There is no problem deciding by reason and common sense applied to the concrete realities what to do and how best to do it. Those things will be thrashed out partly at the Assemblies, partly by day-to-day convenience, and partly by common consent and unwritten rules.

There are alternatives ways to compare processes and evaluate which is most efficient. One way is to make a total of the labour time involved in each. This may be offset by the quality of labour time involved in each. It might be preferable to have two hundred thousands people looking after horses than one hundred thousand working in car factories and ancillary industries. People's demonstrated preferences would dictate which was the case. Another method is to compare directly the quantities of raw materials required. Which is preferred will be a result of comparing the relative scarcity of and demand for each. The trapper in his snow-bound hut, for instance, will have little difficulty in deciding on whether to use his store of coal or his stack of logs for the things he has to do, even when their respective cost has ceased to have any meaning for him. This is an objective evaluation, with a real basis in common sense and the facts which are there for all to see, and is not in principle any more difficult to accomplish in society than in the trapper.

PART III

In this part, I wish to address the question, 'To what extent is the pleasure tendency a rule which is likely to gain widespread assent?'

We have already abandoned, I think, the view that a new 'Utopia' could be thrust upon people by material conditions. We do not pretend that Capitalism does not satisfy the basic needs of the majority of the population of a developed country, and that it does not seem capable of doing so for the foreseeable future. There will certainly be more and more concessions in the 'spiritual' realm, but the need to overthrow the spiritual conditions of life is not inescapable, in the same sense at least as the need to overthrow the material conditions of life is sometimes said to be inescapable.

Contrary to what a Marxist might say, that a change in history is never brought about by a conscious decision or a change in ideas, we might say that a change in history is always, in the last analysis, brought about by a change in ideas; even though a change in ideas might bring into play material forces which reinforced that change, or have material consequences which are instrumental in realising that change, or have material consequences far beyond what was imagined; or have material consequences which bring about ideologies in certain classes which are instrumental in further realising those ideas.

The argument that a certain social idea is a feasible one if only everyone agreed to it of course proves nothing. That is the nature of ideas, or in this case conventions, that they can be adopted at will; and social ideas are no more or less than conventions. It might be a social idea that everyone wore hats on different days. Everyone would live a certain way if... everyone lived a certain way. The question becomes whether or not people are likely to accept it, and the question of practicability almost secondary, as its practicability is dependent to a large degree on its acceptance. This ought to be a question which any idealistic conception is well prepared for, as these conceptions must to a large extent be grounded in what people would be eager to accept.

The next questions we should ask ourselves then might be, 'To what extent is the pleasure tendency a description of rules already in operation, or which "spring naturally from a candid examination of our own inner feelings in relation to the facts" (Keynes I) ?' In other words, is the pleasure tendency already a potential rule ready to spring into operation?

There is another 'confession' to be made in this postulation of new rules. The assertion of what counts as making for happiness tends to be a self-fulfilling prophecy, because what is said to do so will do so. If the wearing of a blue hat is said conventionally to confer satisfaction, the wearer will be satisfied. But the selection of goals can be more arbitrary or less; what makes one or other better is that they spring naturally from people's inner feelings.

I have already given in Part I some of the reasons why I think that the pleasure tendency is a rule which already has limited application. One could mention one of the early problems which computer software companies encountered (early 1980s), that the best programs had been written by amateurs (some as young as 13) and published free in computer magazines. This was a product which the software companies wished to market at anything from £40 to £1000. Those days are largely over, as those amateurs are now writing for the software companies.

In addition to this and similar cases, it is a fact which is easy to verify that in the world as it is today, people operate by the rule of monetary self-interest in order to free themselves to follow the pleasure tendency in their personal lives. People work to allow themselves to pursue their favourite activities, which, unfortunately, are somewhat limited in scope by the fact that so much that is useful can only be pursued as wage labour. I have mentioned above some of the useful things people do for pleasure. Others might be the voluntary services such as W.R.V.S., Lifeboats and mountain rescue teams; and in the more distant past the gentlemen of ample (and not so ample) means undertook the most hazardous of expeditions and explorations just for the sake of it. Hard on their heels, needless to say, followed the merchants, as they will probably follow in the wake of space exploration. The quote from Cosmas ('Dull Reflection', page 10) is relevant here.

The operation of the pleasure tendency in small groups is also explored above. In small groups of people it is implicitly recognised as out of the question that tasks and activities should be organised, and resources allocated, on a monetary basis. Except among rigidly 'egalitarian' communities, it is also implicitly recognised as out of the question that tasks be allocated on a strictly 'equal' basis. That one may cease to do either of these things is one of the important reasons for having a 'social life'. No, in this realm one should have what one wants (and, if it is not possible, have it argued out rationally) and do what one enjoys (and, if it is not possible, also have it argued out rationally).

The rational settlement of issues needs clarification here. The discussion of, and authority on, issues resides with whatever body can command respect and enforce its decisions. That body must, of course, be based on the general assembly. But the criteria by which issues are settled rationally are better left unsaid, for as we have noted, there are many diverse ways in which people see fit to live, and none worse than any other if they really have general assent.

We have said that there are minimum conditions which must be met if people's right to live in their proper and diverse ways is to be fully realised. Among them are the end of the commodity and the revival of the general assembly form of decision-making. I do not think that it is contradictory to say that only one idea will fully allow people to live their lives as they please, because that idea is Freedom; the freedom from unecessary constraint or compulsion.

There is some evidence for saying that people would be eager to accept a general assembly form of 'government'. Vestiges of the old traditions of general meeting places have continued until quite recently. Even today, many people still think that they could 'do it better' locally if only they were given the chance.

There is also the propensity of the population to assume the old and natural ways of organisation in times of crisis. It occurred in the mutinous troops at the end of World War I, in Russia in 1917, in Spain in 1936, in Paris in 1968, and in Poland in 1980. It often surfaces in industrial disputes.

The pleasure tendency is roughly speaking freedom plus common sense. But in a commodity economy, common sense must be imposed by a bureaucratic state and freedom becomes the freedom to produce and consume trivial goods. The free market then rather loses its point, which is ostensibly to give people what they want without bureaucracy.

On Accumulation

'Whence comes this immoderate impatience which nowadays turns a man into a criminal under circumstances which would be more compatible with an opposite tendency? For if one man employs false weights, another burns his house down after he has insured it for a large sum, a third counterfeits false coins, if three-quarters of the upper classes indulge in permitted fraud and have the stock exchange and speculations on their conscience: what drives them? Not actual need, for they are not so badly off, perhaps they even eat and drink without a care - but they are afflicted day and night by a fearful impatience by the slow way with which their money is accumulating and by an equally fearful pleasure in and love of accumulated money. In this impatience and love, however, there turns up again that fanaticism of the lust for power. . .'

Nietzsche. 'Daybreak' 1881.

In this article I hope to examine some of the aspects of wealth as it exists in society today; in particular to show firstly that its primary mode is one of accumulation, and secondly that this tendency for its accumulation derives principally from the concept of exchange-value which dominates its structure. From this I wish to propose that it would be essential for the establishment of a free society to abolish the notion of exchange-value altogether in order to come to grips with the problem of accumulation. It is my contention that this can only be done by recourse to a system of evaluation of material goods or abilities that is rooted in people's subjective desire and that, moreover, such a system not only exists in embryonic form right now but could, if liberated from the constraints and distortions to which it is subjected at present, provide a cohesive and efficient system of production and distribution of resources and utilisation of abilities.

What is Wealth?

It has been pointed out that, unlike power which is realized in its use, it is possible to hoard wealth rather than spend it. Indeed, it is the very nature of money that it should be hoarded as well as, paradoxically, that it should be spent. The nature of the value of money is that of exchange-value rather than use-value - that much is plain. The status of wealth as wealth is unaffected, therefore, by whether it is used (circulated) or not (hoarded), though the specific value may fluctuate one way or the other. If a law were passed that allowed goods to be bought and sold only once and never again, a man who used all his wealth to buy goods might no longer be considered wealthy since his 'wealth' no longer contains exchange-value, even though his goods might have considerable use-value. The urge to accumulate wealth is therefore tied to the form of its only value, that of exchange-value.

'With the earliest development of the circulation of commodities, there is also developed the necessity, and the passionate desire, to hold fast the product of the first metamorphosis. This product is the transformed shape of the commodity, or its gold-chrysalis.'

Marx. 'Capital I'.

As a thing-in-itself it is no contradiction that it be at times an end-in-itself, since hoarding is seen as protecting, consolidating and increasing its intrinsic form. Thus far, a fairly orthodox Marxian view of money including an inherent tendency for its occasional accumulation.

With the process of accumulation comes the establishment of differentials; firstly, because in a world of finite resources an accumulation on the part of one person represents the dispossession of another (property is theft) and secondly, because even if resources were infinite, an equal accumulation by everyone could no longer be seen as a relative accumulation.

A Few Words on Power

Herein lies a similarity with the form of power; putting aside the fact that an accumulation of wealth may establish a differential which creates a power on the part of the accumulator, more fundamentally, a hierarchy or institutionalised power represents a consolidation, ie. an accumulation of power. Furthermore, as in an accumulation of wealth when it is not necessarily the actual spending of the wealth which gives the accumulation its worth but the continued potential to do so, so it is with power that, in order that it may be consolidated, it must preserve its potential to be exercised. This it does by transforming the principle by which it operates: it must exchange might for right. As Rousseau puts it, 'The strongest is never strong enough to be always master, unless he transforms strength into right, and obedience into duty.' ('The Social Contract' 1.3 1762). In addition, if the root purpose of power can be said to be the benefits derived from exercising an ability (whether an ability of strength or skill), accumulated power must extend its benefits into areas unrelated to the original ability. Both these transformations it accomplishes by means of ideology.

If Peter and Paul run a race and Paul wins, it is established that on this occasion Paul has the ability to run faster. We might even say, for the sake of argument, that Paul has the ability to run faster than Peter in all races on all occasions. So far, so good; Paul has power over Peter in the form of being able to run faster. Now suppose it were decided that the fastest runners were to be rulers and to decide upon the distribution of bread (the ideology at work here would presumably be one of 'tachistocracy' - rule by the swiftest). Two things have changed: Paul now has a power unrelated to his original ability and a sanction (potentially to withold bread from Peter) unrelated to his original ability, which sanction Paul might use over Peter to accrue benefits (unrelated to the benefits of running faster) to himself. Power has become consolidated, accumulated. It is, of course, not possible to abolish differences of ability, (nor, as some Maoists appear to believe, would it be in the least bit desirable) neither, therefore, is it possible to abolish the directly related sanction of witholding that ability from the service of another. The value of that sanction alone in terms of accumulated power, however, might be undermined both by the fact that it is likely that most people have an ability of some sort and by a generalized ethos of reciprocity. The capability to institutionalise power, to accumulate it - indeed its very life-blood - relies on its principle of mutability when acted on by ideology; both of its sanctions in order to preserve itself, and of its benefits in order that it be worth preserving. With the accumulation of power, ability is transformed into authority.

What is crucial to avoid the accumulation of power, ie. the establishment of hierarchical or institutionalised power, is that power/ability is seen as transitory and wholly limited (along with the sanction of that ability being witheld) to its direct sphere of operation and that no ideology be allowed to challenge this principle. An example from Athenian radical democracy (fifth

century B.C.):

> 'The professional was given as little scope as possible; indeed, the expert was usually a public slave. Every citizen was, in turn, a soldier (or sailor), a legislator, a judge, an administrator. . .To the Athenian at least, self-rule by discussion, self-discipline, personal responsibility, direct participation in the life of the polis at all points - these things were the breath of life. . .the Athenian never employed the professional administrator or judge if he could possibly help it. The polis was a kind of super-family, and family life means taking a direct part in family affairs and family counsels. This attitude to the polis explains, too, why the Greek never, as we say, 'invented' representative government. Why should he 'invent' something which most Greeks struggled to abolish, namely being governed by someone else?'
>
> H.D.F. Kitto. 'The Greeks'

The similarity between forms of wealth and power is that both tend to be accumulated; the former driven by exchange-value, the latter by ideology. This tendency for accumulation which serves no other purpose than to preserve itself and no other function than the enslavement of humanity, must be specifically and absolutely opposed.

Blueprints to Avoid

Various suggestions have been made to avoid the accumulation of wealth. One is the idea of time-expiry money : every Monday, say, everyone might be issued (presumably by some centralised bureaucracy) with a cheque to a given value of goods. The value of this cheque would expire on Sunday night thus avoiding any possible accumulation of cheques over a period of time. However, it is difficult to see how such 'money' would circulate since as the deadline approached the desire to get shot of your cheque and turn it into goods would increase dramatically. People might start refusing to accept the cheques too close to the deadline if they calculated that they could not get rid of them again in time. Such refusal to accept the cheques would create a new deadline and so on. No one would want to be holding the cheques when they expired and yet someone would have to be, the result would be chaos.

A second idea is Marx's non-circulating cheques issued to the value of the number of labour-hours one had worked and exchangeable only at a central repository of manufactured goods valued in labour-hours. The problems with this are myriad, since, in addition to the varying pleasantness/effort of different forms of 'work', the exchange-value would remain intact and there would therefore be no guarantee that these cheques could not be accumulated (nor, for that matter, that they would not circulate) before being ultimately exchanged at the repository.

If we modify Marx's suggestion and include the concept of time-expiry those cheques would have to be exchanged at the repository for goods by Sunday night. Great, no accumulation. However, in this system, as well as presupposing a very particular form of industrialised labour which one might not expect to be the sole, or even predominant, form of useful activity, the alienation of labour would remain undiminished by this supposed elimination of surplus-value - labour would still be evaluated ultimately in exchangeable labour-hour units.

No, the question of the accumulation of wealth and its attendant problems are ultimately connected to the existence of exchange-value. Could a way then

be found to evaluate the other value which Marx mentions, that of use-value? Marx believed this evaluation to be impossible and he was right. But let us suppose that use-value can be evaluated and that a table has a use-value of 1 table-use-unit. Leaving aside the question of how many table-use-units a chair is worth, tables could now be exchanged 'fairly' on the basis of their use-value, since five tables would have a use-value of five table-use-units and not just to Peter but also to Paul. But here, by evaluating a universally recognised use-value all we have done is re-evaluate an exchange-value, now, as distinct from the situation at present, directly related to a commodity's utility. Thus with the re-invention of exchange-value, the problem of accumulation re-emerges. Paul can realise an accumulation of five table-use-units whether in tables or in chairs (unless we imagine that tables can only ever be exchanged for tables and chairs for chairs and so on, which would be self-evidently pointless).

A Suggestion

What we require to avoid accumulation is a money-less society, but more than that, a society where people create goods and services and receive goods and services "for nothing". But how, then, could one understand an exchange or economic interaction from an evaluative standpoint without an exchange-value? Only by evaluating goods and services in terms of their direct desire-value. This is not another word for use-value since the desire-value of a table to Peter might not equal the value of the same table to Paul whereas the absolute utility of that table would presumably remain constant. Desire-value throws up a number of interesting points; the first of which is demonstrated by that last example - that the desire-value of an object resides not only in the object but also in the desirer. It is therefore the only evaluation of an object's worth that can be said to be subjectively true. It is also not translatable into an externalized exchange-value. It varies from object to object, from desirer to desirer, from situation to situation, from day to day. In addition, it might be so that twenty tables might have less desire-value to a given person than one table (unless that person was starting a canteen or something). In addition, there is no reason why desire-value should not operate just as well between groups and between individuals and groups as it might between individuals.

Furthermore, all things, whether abstract or concrete, may have a desire-value assessed against qualitatively different objects. I should stress here that is not my intention to advocate that this is the basis upon which production and exchange in a future society should be consciously evaluated; on the contrary, it would take place more or less without recourse to evaluation, freely within a general spirit of mutuality and reciprocity. It is, rather, an attempt to look seriously at a theory behind such exhortations as those to "produce and exchange on the basis of need/desire/use" which crop up whenever the iniquities of an exchange-value based system are understood.

The Gift

An economy (if I may use that word) based on desire-value would truly represent an economy of the gift.

> 'For me - and for some others, I dare to think - there can be no equilibrium in sickness. Planning is merely the flip side of the free market. The only thing subject to planning is exchange - and with it the mutual sacrifice it entails. But if the word "innovation" means anything it means

transcendence, not camouflage. In fact, a truly new reality can only be based on the principle of the gift.'

Vaneigem. The Revolution Of Everyday Life.

If it is agreed, from the arguments above, that it is important to examine the possibility of a system of production and distribution totally free from mediating exchange-value, what may be less clear is why the basis for such a system cannot be left to the assumed 'altruism' (in the strict sense) of the liberated individual. Whereas altruism is not to be disallowed, it is hardly to be relied upon as a cornerstone of the New World. We are not founding a religion. Moreover, the link between autonomous and heteronomous activity in New World (assuming that they co-exist - say, the latter for the provision of the most fundamental necessities of survival, in times of emergency and for grand projects freely embarked upon by a general assembly and requiring (again by general assent) a system of organisation that would lend to the labour a heteronomous nature) is, in the heart of the individual, what pleasure, of whatever sort, he subjectively believes he and his community will derive from such activity. Such link is the key to the transcendence of the division between heteronomous and autonomous activity. Man is a social animal. How could he objectively assume the increased welfare of a group or community from his contribution unless he subjectively derived benefit from so contributing? When Margolis proposes that the individual has two utility functions, an S-utility (the individual's self-interest) and a G-utility (the individual's conception of the welfare of the 'group' to which he feels he belongs) and suggests that, with the resources at their disposal, the S-self maximises S-utility while the G-self maximises G-utility, he performs the same trick as the existentialists, setting the individual's interests permanently at loggerheads with the interests of all other individuals. Hell is other people. Altruism is an insidious doctrine - it denies forever the pleasure and benefit of cooperation.

It has been pointed out by others that 'gift interaction' (I will avoid the word 'exchange' in this context so as not to confuse the issue) is founded on a fundamentally different principle than that of economic exchange, whether primitive as in barter or sophisticated as in today's world of futures and electronic credit. An example of gift interaction which may shed some light on the principles involved is that of the ancient Greek practice from the late Dark Age (the late 8th Century B.C.) of giving ξενεια (xeneia). This was based on a special relationship which existed between guest and host (both known by the Greek word ξενος (xenos) - the word for stranger). An individual could travel empty-handed throughout the Greek world and wherever he went he would receive not only board and lodging but also gifts as a matter of course from the host that took him in. These gifts were frequently expensive (in a monetary sense) and were due as a matter of honour even if the stranger stayed only a single night. There was no direct exchange involved, but neither was this in any way an expression of altruism; notwithstanding the element of competitive generosity (my surplus is bigger than yours) the main purpose of this tradition was to create a network whereby one might travel freely within the fragmented Greek world, where news and stories from other places might reach your ears and where personal links for the future, whether ever exploited or not, might be created. The principle of guest-friendship was taken extremely seriously, indeed, a breach of honour within this tradition sparked off the Trojan War. Whilst in no way serving as a model for desire-value interaction (it co-existed with a firm idea of exchange-value reflecting the generosity of the gift-giver and indeed was exploited by individuals such as Odysseus to amass enormous personal wealth) the concept of xeneia demonstrates an example of non-altruistic gift-interaction.

'Though they may resemble primitive commercial transactions in the element of immediate or ultimate return expected, such gift relations are really a quite different mode even

> of regulating exchange in the societies and areas where they operate, as Marcel Mauss has shown. In the Homeric world their purpose is not primarily related to profit or even ultimate benefit but (like bridegifts and the feasting of peers) to the acquisition of honour and the creation of a network of obligations.'
>
> O. Murray. 'Early Greece'.

Marcel Mauss in his 'Essai sur le don' an extensive anthropological study of gift interactions in various societies , whilst providing few examples which are entirely free from any element of mediation by either commodity or power, amply demonstrates the different underlying principle of gift-interaction from that of exchange-value based systems. That principle lies neither in profit nor in altruism but in a morality which recognises the interdependence of the pleasure principles of individuals. As E.E. Evans-Pritchard says in his introduction to the English translation of that work, they represent

> '. . .a system in which exchange of goods was not a mechanical but a moral transaction, bringing about and maintaining human, personal relationships between individuals and groups.'

Lest it be thought such examples lie only in the distant past or in esoteric anthropological studies, one need only look as far as the concept of hitch-hiking for a contemporary example both of an open-ended self-interested desire-value interaction and of how such examples are under attack, marginalised by the ever-increasing legitimation of the commodity and the mistrust between alienated individuals.

Desire-Value

With the identification of mediating exchange-value as the precursor to inevitable accumulation and thus to exploitation much has been said about exchange (sic) on the level of desire. What remains obscure, however, is what would be the mechanism of such interactions and, accordingly, whether such a system would have any tendency to allocative efficiency which it might need to resolve problems of scarcity. Desire-value might be defined as that abstract expression of a subjective perception of the direct relationship between the inherent qualities of an object and the pleasure principle of an individual. The simplest closed-system microeconomic model of such a transaction is the swap. As William J. Baumol points out, only slightly missing the point,

> '. . .the apparently trivial assertion that if you have a bottle of whiskey (which you dislike) and I have a fifth of gin (which I detest), why - let's swap! However, the result should not be scorned. Many a sage has missed this apparently simple point and argued that whatever one of the traders gains he must have taken away from the other, so that there can be no net advantage from trade.'
>
> 'Economic Theory And Operations Analysis'. 1977.

The point Baumol has missed is that it is on the basis of desire-value that the exchange has produced the 'net advantage'. The introduction of worth and money would serve only to distort that advantage.

So much for swaps - the desire-value of receiving something is fairly easy to comprehend. What is more difficult to understand is the desire-value of giving, against which would be off-set the negative desire-value of giving up what one has. This can be resolved, however, if the essential non-

altruistic (interdependant self-intererested or cooperative) nature of such systems is understood (see above). Broadly speaking, the desire-value of giving might be seen to be made up of three components. First, there is the immediate return, if any; whether this is in terms of a concrete object in return, as in the swap model or of something as intangible as the look of happiness on the face of the recipient (the so-called joy of giving). Next, there are two more components which together express general support for and involvement in the system. The first of these relates to the future; either the desire-value of generating some obligation from the recipient of one's 'gift', ie. the desire-value of what he might give you in the future (cf. xeneia) or merely the desire-value of a future benefit that one might receive from any source from within the system that one has maintained and strengthened by one's participation. For example, hitch-hiking; you may not expect to be picked up by the very chap who one gave a lift to last week, but by giving a lift now one is maintaining a system by which one might expect to benefit in the future, although it is also true to say that one might give a lift to someone for immediate return in the form of, say, company. The final component would be the desire-value of fulfilling any obligations that one might feel one has from former participation in the system, either towards an individual or in general. These last two components are controversial, depending as they do upon a 'moral' principle; that free-loading is wrong. That such a principle is not incompatible with self-interest should be plain both from the nature of reciprocal cooperation and from the very real likelihood that justice would soon catch up with persistent and malicious free-loaders (in a way in which it does not today) resulting in possible exclusion from the sytem altogether. That such a principle is not incompatible with theories of economic motivation can be seen by the discussion of this and other slightly different moral principles in Robert Sugden's paper 'Reciprocity: The Supply Of Public Goods Through Voluntary Contributions' (The Economic Journal, 94 (December 1984), 772-787). (1)

It is clear that desire-value is a concept that is not strictly quantitative but qualitative (like Thom's Catastrophe Theory) or a ranking measurement (like the ordinalist theory of consumer preference which it resembles in content as well as form). However, such a concept might be not without use in putting the idea of a non exchange-value based society to those who do not consider themselves revolutionaries (2) and showing that exchange-value mediates in systems of production and distribution in the worst sense; that is that it distorts any transaction by separating the needs of one party from the needs of the other. Indeed, on the occasions that exchange-value facilitates distribution, it does so grudgingly, with a mutual recognition of both parties as objects and at the expense of any sense of shared humanity (as demonstrated by the phrase, "Your money is as good as anybody's, I suppose.").

The principle of desire-value is not, of course, entirely absent from exchange-vbalue mediated transactions - such principle, however, is distorted by the interpolation of exchange-value. Exchange-value transactions, as well as leading to accumulation and subsequent exploitation, have no <u>direct correlation</u> with desire or need and, as such, can be said to be inherently inefficient <u>in human terms</u> (3). (Thus does money distort the free market!).

The issue of accumulation is one, I think, which cannot be ducked. All too often a theory of present ills is marred by inadequate attempts at proposals for alternative structures or worse, a total absence of such proposals altogether. Such suggestions for the future must spring directly from an analysis of the present. Our lives have become so dominated by the economy that while the pernicious nature of this domination may be readily grasped, it sometimes seems almost impossible to draw on examples and ideas from outside the conceptual framework of things and their price. But the battle for ideas is on, the search is an urgent one and we need only look to the nature of our humanity to find the inspiration and examples we need.

NOTES

1. "A very different approach is to suppose that people follow a morality, not of altruism but of cooperation. Theories of this kind assume that individuals pursue self-interest subject to moral constraints, and that these constraints are rules which - roughly speaking it is in everyone's interest that everyone should follow."

Robert Sugden.

2. For instance, taking the aforementioned ordinalist theory as a model, it might be possible to plot the Marginal Rate of Substitution of the component desire-values on a sort of three-dimensional indifference curve and show that by maximisation of desire-value the system would have a tendency towards Pareto optimality - a Capitalist economic criterion of allocative efficiency. This is saying nothing more remarkable than that there is more desire-value in giving a loaf of bread to a starving man than in giving it to someone who has just eaten a five-course meal.

3. Like the school text-book on 'O' Level Economics which states, 'A penniless man dying of starvation has a desperate "need", but no "demand", for food.'

Extracts from a Vocabulary

Pleasure Principle

The principle by which individuals seek to maximise pleasure and avoid pain.

Pleasure Tendency

(1) That expression of the pleasure principle whereby the fulfilment of desire is pursued in a direct and unmediated manner and in a manner which recognises the social interdependence between such a principle and the pleasure of other individuals.
(2) The name of the group seeking to propagate these ideas in their social, political and temporal context.

Commodity

Anything (object, individual, concept, abstraction, relationship between or aspect of these) whose primary value is perceived in terms of exchange-value rather than in terms of the direct relationship between the inherent qualities of such an object, concept etc., and the pleasure principle of an individual.

Autonomous Activity

Any activity over all aspects of which an individual or community(2) has independent direct control.

Heteronomous Activity

Any activity over all aspects of which an individual or community(2) does not have independent direct control.

Effeminization

The comandeering (whether consciously or not) of any or all of those attributes commonly held to express femininity in order to serve Power.

Community

(1) A specious collectivity amongst individuals mediated by some aspect of culture(2).
(2) Any collection of individuals whose pleasure principles interact.

Class

see Community(1)

Culture

(1) Any appearance of organisation in the relationship between commodities. Its primary function is to sell these or other commodities.
(2) An expression of culture(1) that is seen as an aspect of a community(1).
(3) An expression of the pleasure tendency

within a group of individuals.

General Assembly — The sovereign body and expression of will of any collection of individuals whose pleasure principles interact.

Morality — Precepts yielding rules to be applied in the distribution of rights whether to validate and strengthen the relationship of power between individuals or to facilitate the expression of the pleasure tendency.

Art — The commodity form of creativity.

Power — The ability to exercise the will over one's own life or that of others.

Mediation — The state in which two things are connected via something else, as when the individual (a) experiences life (d) as a succession of commodities (b,c); (a-b-d),(a-c-d).

Spirituality — The vital sentient, intelligent or emotional side of an individual, often in implied or expressed contrast with or transcendence of the material conditions of existence.

Altruism — That spurious idea that the interests of the self are necessarily in conflict with the interests of others.

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