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Consumption and the Cost of Meeting Household Needs

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Leader-level impunity is not well explained by deficiencies in law or extinguished reliably by correction of those deficiencies. Nor is this impunity often fully explained by disincentives to collective action or by peculiarities in political culture. Motivational insight here may usefully come from outside the expected disciplines.

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Consumption and the Cost of Meeting Household Needs

Jerome M. Segal

“Clothing sufficient for warmth, of a sufficiently good quality to be economical, but with no further regard for appearance and style than is necessary to permit the family members to appear in public and within their rather narrow social circle without slovenliness or loss of self-respect” This is how the Bureau of Labor Statistics, in a 1920 report entitled *Minimum Quantity Budget Necessary to Maintain a Worker’s Family of Five in Health and Decency*, described the category of clothing in establishing the quantity of items a typical government worker would need to purchase to maintain a decent standard of living.

Since its earliest days, the study and establishment of needs budgets is a topic fraught with ambiguities and assumptions—and none more so than the understanding of what constitutes a need. What *are* needs? Economists tend to talk about desires or preferences, and they view expenditures as expressing preferences that emerge from desires. But they generally view the concept of need with suspicion, considering it too subjective to use in empirical study. But these misgivings aside, the concept of need continually reasserts itself. The question, “How much do we really need?” has a resilience that suggests that it may make more sense to try to develop acceptable methodologies for answering it, than simply to turn our backs on the question. This article first examines several aspects of need and describes briefly the history of research into the cost of meeting needs in America. Based on these considerations, I suggest some approaches that may be useful in researching the cost of meeting needs, and I apply these considerations to two examples: food and shelter.

The Cost of Meeting Core Needs: Two Distinctions

Desire vs. Need. Although people tend to know their desires, they may be completely unaware of their needs. This is certainly the case in the area of nutrition. Long before scientists discovered vitamin C, humans have needed the vitamin and suffer in its absence. While no one *desires* vitamin C, everyone is *harmed* in

its absence. In ascertaining a person’s needs, it is often the case that other people have greater knowledge than the person himself. For knowledge of needs—in this case, nutritional needs—one cannot rely on introspection, but instead must rely on expert information.

Human beings have all sorts of needs, ranging from needs for minimal clothing and shelter, to needs for self-fulfillment and love. Moreover, all of these needs, even the most esoteric, directly or indirectly are connected to the economic sphere. Vast amounts of consumer spending are motivated by beliefs (often encouraged by advertising) that link deep-seated psychological needs to the purchase of specific goods and

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services. In the discussion that follows, however, I focus only on rather prosaic needs, those that are tied to physical well-being and commonplace notions of social decency.

Cost vs. Spending. Before considering the cost of meeting needs, it is important to bear in mind the distinction between cost and spending. Determining the cost of meeting basic needs differs from ascertaining the amount actually spent on basic needs. Cost figures reveal how much someone *would have to spend* to satisfy a need; the consumer expenditure numbers, collected in great detail by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, reveal only how much people *actually spend*. And although these expenditures are categorized in what may sound like “need categories” (e.g., Food, Clothing, Shelter, Health), it is a mistake to assume that actual expenditures in any of these categories can be translated into the cost of meeting the associated need. Rich people may spend far more on food than they actually need, and poor people may spend far less.

Table 1

Consumption expenditures of “normal” families in principle industrial center in 33 states, as a percentage of total expenditures, 1901

Food	43.1%
Rent	18.1%
Fuel	4.6%
Light	1.1%
Clothing	13.0%
Sundries (which include household supplies and equipment, transportation, health care, entertainment, personal care items and services, education, contributions, and insurance)	20.1%

Source: *How American Buying Habits Change*, Department of Labor, 1959

What Do Americans Spend Their Money On? A Quick Snapshot

For over a hundred years, researchers have gathered information on American spending habits. In 1901 the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics undertook a major study of consumer expenditures. Looking at the consumption patterns of urban wage earners in thirty-three states, the study outlined the spending patterns of “normal” families, defined as an employed husband, a wife, and no more than five children (none of whom were over the age of fourteen), with no dependents, lodgers, or servants. Table 1 summarizes (as a percentage) the findings on how these families spent their incomes.

In comparing spending habits, most striking is the change in the percentage of total expenditures devoted to food—in 1901 families devoted 43% of their expenditures to food. Today, American families devote

Studying what people spend their money on is quite different from studying how much money they actually need.

approximately 14% of their expenditures to food, and of that, 40% is for food consumed out of the home. While food has declined markedly as a spending category, there has been an astonishing increase in another area: Transportation. At the beginning of the twentieth century, transportation amounted to only 1 or 2% of total spending. It didn’t even rate a separate category.

By the end of the century, American families were spending far more on transportation than on food, and for many transportation had become a larger spending area than shelter. (Table 2 shows the transition from 1950 to 2000.)

How Much Money Do Americans Need? A Brief History of the Search for an Answer

As noted above, studying *what* people spend their money on is quite different from studying *how much* money they actually need. Investigations of this second question also go back to the beginning of the twentieth century. Often these inquiries were motivated by an effort to set fair or reasonable wages. Thus, just after World War I, Congress directed the

Living wage studies address some of the inadequacies of an official “poverty line,” and they help identify a wage that would allow families to be “self-sufficient.”

Labor Department to determine how much it costs to live at a decent standard in Washington, D.C.—Congress was interested in finding a basis for setting the salaries of its own employees.

Over time, the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) formalized this kind of inquiry. Starting in 1946 the BLS undertook a series of family budget studies that determined cost levels for attaining “health and decency.” These studies, as with earlier BLS work, supplied a

Table 2
Allocation of Total Consumer Expenditures, 1950–2000

	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000
	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Food	27.0%	22.0%	17.8%	18.8%	15.1%	13.5%
Food at home		17.6%	13.9%	14.1%	8.8%	7.8%
Food away from home		4.4%	3.8%	4.7%	6.4%	5.7%
Alcoholic beverages	1.5%	1.4%	0.9%	1.6%	1.0%	1.1%
Housing	24.8%	26.0%	28.0%	29.5%	30.7%	31.1%
Shelter	10.2%	12.2%	16.0%	16.5%	17.0%	17.7%
Utilities, fuels and public services	3.8%	4.4%	6.2%	7.4%	6.7%	6.2%
Household operations	4.3%	5.1%	1.5%	1.5%	1.6%	1.8%
Housekeeping supplies					1.4%	1.4%
House furnishings and equipment	6.5%	4.7%	4.4%	4.2%	4.0%	4.1%
Apparel and related services	10.6%	9.2%	7.8%	5.4%	5.7%	5.0%
Transportation	12.5%	13.7%	18.7%	20.2%	18.0%	18.8%
Vehicle purchases (net outlay)			7.5%	6.9%	7.5%	8.6%
Gasoline and motor oil			4.3%	6.9%	3.7%	3.3%
Other vehicle expenses			5.7%	5.1%	5.8%	5.8%
Public transportation	1.5%	1.4%	1.2%	1.3%	1.1%	1.1%
Health care	4.8%	6.0%	4.6%	4.4%	5.2%	5.3%
Entertainment	4.1%	3.6%	4.1%	4.4%	5.0%	4.9%
Personal care products/services	2.1%	2.6%	1.1%	0.9%	1.3%	1.5%
Reading	0.8%	0.7%	0.5%	0.7%	0.5%	0.4%
Education	0.5%	.9%	1.3%	1.2%	1.4%	1.6%
Tobacco products and supplies	1.7%	1.6%	1.4%	1.0%	1.0%	0.8%
Miscellaneous	1.3%	2.0%	1.1%	1.5%	3.0%	2.1%
Cash contributions	3.8%	5.0%	3.9%	2.9%	2.9%	3.3%
Personal insurance and pensions	4.2%	5.3%	8.7%	7.4%	9.1%	10.7%
Life and other personal insurance			3.9%	1.6%	1.2%	1.1%
Pensions and Social Security			4.8%	5.8%	7.9%	9.7%

Note: 1950 was for all households in areas of 2,500 and up. 1960 was for all urban and rural. 1970 was for urban. 1980 was for urban (less students). 1990 and 2000 was for all households.

“quantity budget,” which provided a detailed list of the specific goods and services that would need to be purchased. The quantity budget was very specific, specifying even the number of undergarments for each member of the household. Using the quantity budget, an actual cost budget was calculated using pricing studies for cities around the country.

The BLS continued these studies until 1982, when the program was abandoned, both because the Reagan Administration had little interest in such research, but also because the BLS methodology came under serious

attack. However, shortly after its demise, localities began to undertake similar studies, and economists developed a “needs-based poverty line,” which essentially followed the BLS approach. This in turn gave rise to the “living wage” or “self-sufficiency wage” studies prevalent in recent years.

Increasingly refined forms of living wage or “self-sufficiency” studies are conducted today not just by government agencies but to a large extent by non-profit organizations, with support from foundations and labor unions. These studies are of considerable

interest to government departments and other organizations concerned with welfare reform, public assistance, and poverty alleviation. Living wage studies address some of the inadequacies of an official “poverty line,” and they help identify a wage that would allow families to be “self-sufficient” (that is, able to meet core needs without public assistance).

It is useful to briefly note some of the methodological difficulties the BLS and others encountered when trying to determine how much money a family needs. Some of these difficulties are apparent when one considers the food sector. In many ways, food seemed the most objective of the various need categories, with much data from scientists and nutritional experts. Thus, food budgets specified, in great detail, the quantities and varieties of meat, fish, cheese, milk, grain, fruits, and vegetables necessary to maintain a family in health. And as nutritional information about calories, vitamins, and minerals expanded, these food budgets were modified. More than any other area, food budgets were seen as “experts’ budgets.”

But, as a 1980 Advisory Committee charged with examining the BLS studies pointed out, there were deep problems with these food budgets. It turned out that it was possible to come up with nutritionally sound diets across a very wide range of cost levels, including costs well below those generally identified as low income or “thrifty.” The BLS family budgets relied upon food budgets developed by the Department of Agriculture—but rather than starting with nutritional need and then solving for least cost figures, these budgets started with specified income ranges and then developed nutritional budgets for specific income levels. Thus, using these budgets to ascertain how much was needed to meet nutritional needs seemed eminently circular. While the charge of circularity wasn’t totally fair to the BLS researchers—they were trying to ascertain costs within some cultural constraints on eating habits—the approach was quite problematic. In theory, the problem could be avoided by identifying a food budget for the absolutely cheapest way to achieve nutritional adequacy, but hardly any American family actually eats that way. And what good would it do to point out that if poor American families suffering malnutrition adopted the eating habits of the peasantry in other societies, malnutrition could be avoided?



From: Trades and Occupations, edited by Carol Belanger Grafton (Dover Publications, Inc., 1990).

One way of understanding what the BLS was trying to do is to say (though the BLS didn’t) that there exists some other, ill-defined need, something more than mere nutritional adequacy that requires the specified spending levels. Failure to specify such implicit factors made the studies seem arbitrary. (Paradoxically, although the BLS ended studies of this type, this same food budget continues to be used as the basis of the Federal poverty line—defined as three times the cost of the “Thrifty”

food plan. Further, even today’s living wage budgets, which reject the idea of using a multiple of the food budget, utilize a seemingly arbitrary U.S. Department of Agriculture budget to specify the cost of the food component of the overall budget.)

Four Methodological Keys

Four considerations are useful in searching for an adequate methodology for pricing the cost of meeting needs.

1. Examine the expenditure levels at which basic needs problems emerge. Over the years, most of the work in ascertaining the cost of meeting needs consisted of specifying needs, translating these into commodities that are needed and then pricing the commodities and summing to reach an overall income requirement. An alternative approach, one found at the beginning of the twentieth century, focused on specific behaviors or conditions that showed that needs were not being met (e.g., malnutrition, wearing ragged clothing,

illiteracy). The prevalence of these conditions was examined in relation to actual income and spending patterns. This allowed one to reach rough and ready conclusions (e.g., when family income in 1908 reached \$1,200 it was generally the case the problems that arise when needs are unmet disappeared). Closer inspection showed that different kinds of problems disappeared at different income or spending levels. This kind of approach can be usefully employed to link *actual* expenditure levels to those required to *truly* meet needs (e.g., \$800, the median amount actually spent by a family of four for shelter in the year 2000, is an amount clearly insufficient to live in a safe neighborhood in many parts of the U.S.)

2. Specify needs in functional rather than physical terms. Need-based budgets, with their detailed lists of goods and services and with efforts to identify accurate prices, tend to push the needs themselves into the

Graceful Simplicity: Toward a Philosophy and Politics of Simple Living

Jerome M. Segal

In *Graceful Simplicity*, Jerome M. Segal expands and deepens the contemporary discourse on how to achieve a simpler, less harried way of life. He articulates a powerful conception of simple living—rooted in beauty, peace of mind, appreciativeness, and generosity of spirit. At the same time, he criticizes much of the “simple living movement” for believing that we can realize this conception as isolated individuals if only we free ourselves from overconsumption. Segal argues that, unfortunately, we have created a society in which human needs can be adequately met only at high levels of income. Instead of individual renunciation, he calls for a politics of simplicity that would put the facilitation of simple living at the heart of our approach to social and economic policy.

“Graceful Simplicity is a marvelously textured analysis of the elusive ideal of simple living. For those eager to find a way to get off the “more is better” treadmill, Jerome Segal offers insight and hope. Drawing upon philosophy, history, economics, sociology, and psychology, he explains why simplicity is not a simple concept and reveals why it retains its perennial allure. A must read.”

—David Shi, president of Furman University and author of *The Simple Life: Plain Living and High Thinking in American Culture*

“In simple, graceful prose, Jerome Segal explains why less elaborate modes of living would make us happier.”

—Robert H. Frank, Cornell University, author of *Luxury Fever*

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background. Indeed, sometimes virtually no effort is made to articulate the needs in question; instead, various commodities are simply organized under general spending rubrics such as “food,” “shelter,” and “clothing.” Inevitably over time and as the culture changed, the list of goods and services required to satisfy a given need also changed. This led many to conclude that the needs also changed, and it seemed impossible to develop consistent time-series data of the cost of meeting needs. Moreover, when one has examined a variety of different quantity budgets, each particular one begins to look increasingly arbitrary.

Characterizing needs in functional terms leads to greater conceptual surefootedness. Thus, rather than providing either broad general characterizations of needs (e.g., food, clothing) or detailed commodity specifications (that a family needs an automobile, or a house of a certain size), one would try to identify the underlying functions to be served by such commodities. The functional approach reveals, for instance, that within the category “transportation” there has existed a constant need “to be able to get around between the familiar loci of everyday life”—between home and workplace and school and friends and marketplace. Such functional needs have been relatively constant, and emerge in very diverse societies. But the commodities required to enable one to get around—whether on foot, via bicycle, bus, or personal car—may change substantially. It should be noted that this way of speaking about needs moves us into the “capability” language espoused in recent years by Nobel laureate economist Amartya Sen, and centuries earlier by Adam Smith (e.g., clothing commodities are needed because they give rise to specific capabilities such as the ability to appear in public without shame).

3. Get very detailed about needs. As shown in the discussion above concerning food, when need is characterized merely in terms of health concerns, specific food plans took on an arbitrary character (since nutritional goals can be met at lower as well as higher levels of spending). But if such food plans were not arbitrary, but instead responded to some other non-nutritional, but unarticulated needs, then these require identification. A viable approach would involve two moves. First, the investigation could embrace a “least cost” orientation—the one non-arbitrary approach. This however would have to be interpreted contextually and set within specified constraints. Thus, achieving the least cost way of satisfying specific needs sometimes requires considerable information, sometimes considerable search or preparation time, and sometimes considerable willingness to move outside of familiar cultural patterns. One could of course seek absolutely least cost numbers without any constraints, but these would be of little practical value. Rather, the constraints should be detailed, but within them, the

least cost ways of satisfying the needs in question are exactly what one is looking for when one asks the “how much money is required . . . ?” type of question. Secondly, this kind of “least cost” approach needs to be embedded within a fully articulated set of needs. Human needs are enormously diverse, and it is rarely the case that any commodity is sought merely because it satisfies one particular need. For instance, even in the poorest cultures, there exists an aesthetic dimension to life that enters into the basics of food, clothing and shelter. Thus, no culture treats food as if its sole purpose was to provide nutrition. Enormous amounts of cultural and personal energy are devoted to the discovery, development and transmission of the information and skill that allow food to taste good, and enable even the poorest people to occasionally have a great celebration.

4. Work with multiple standards. In considering the question of what needs to consider, or what exactly counts as a necessity, one must realize that there exists no single answer. Just as the Federal Reserve in its statistics on the supply of money provides data in relation to a wide array of alternative definitions of “money”—ranging from currency, to currency-plus-checking-account balances, to both of these plus credit card limits—so too is it possible to develop an array of living standards, each specified in detail, and each subject to investigation into the cost of living at that particular standard.

Core Economic Capabilities of a Middle Class Standard: Two Examples

A middle class standard is just one of many that one might seek to “cost out.” By a “middle class standard” I don’t necessarily mean the life pattern that corresponds to families living on median levels of income, but rather a standard that satisfies the values and expectations of broad segments of the American population. While a full discussion would examine the economic capabilities in the areas of food, shelter, clothing, transportation, education and child care, health, and economic security, let me offer core economic capabilities for two of these: food and shelter.

Food. I suggest that a person lives at a middle class standard if:

A person eats nutritiously, hosts with pride, eats diverse foods of good quality, celebrates holidays, eats produce out of season, purchases lunch in the workplace, and occasionally takes the family out for dinner.

In earlier decades, food was the largest item in the budget. So central was food, that the U.S. poverty line was based on the cost of meeting food needs. But spending levels for food, to some extent then and certainly today, far exceeds the rock bottom cost of securing nutrition, and thus provides little insight into the cost of meeting that particular capability.

Central are such social capabilities as the ability to host with pride. Food consumption is a social act that occurs within cultural definitions of what constitutes food, what is considered palatable, aesthetically acceptable, skillfully cooked, and so on. Among the many psychological and social needs that food addresses, for many, satisfying food needs requires the ability to eat in ways that are typical within one’s society. Put in financial terms, the cost of meeting this richer set of food capabilities in our society will not be too different from the existing level of median food expenditures. This suggests that at least with regard to food, we are in a kind of consumption trap, where we find ourselves needing more elaborate commodities as the general income rises. Individuals may escape this, sometimes by escaping to a particular subculture. But for most of us, we are on something of an escalator. The expenditure level required to satisfy an underlying need does expand as income grows. But given the sharp decline in the percentage of consumption actually devoted to food, it is not a terribly fast moving escalator; over time, smaller percentages of our higher incomes appear to suffice.

Broadly speaking, I think we can say that most American families satisfy the middle class food standard articulated above. If this is so, a quick look at existing expenditure levels gives a sense of what it costs to achieve the middle class standard. In 1999 the average food expenditure level for consumer units composed of “husband and wife with children” was \$7,034. On a per person basis this expenditure was

Food consumption is a social act that occurs within cultural definitions of what constitutes food, what is considered palatable, aesthetically acceptable, skillfully cooked, and so on.

\$1,804. If we look at single parent households, more than half of which live under the poverty line, we find per person spending at \$1,560. This tells us that actual spending isn’t all over the map. One might with some comfort conclude that the per person cost of meeting the above-articulated food standard falls within the range of the 20th to 80th percentile. This very broad band is actually quite narrow in financial terms, between \$1,715 and \$2,221 per person.

Shelter. Here a middle class standard can be specified as one in which the family:

Lives in a house or apartment with protection from the elements, with sufficient light and ventilation to sustain good health; lives in sanitary and spacial conditions not generally viewed as disgraceful; lives in a neighborhood where children can safely be outside alone; and lives where there is access to good public schools.

Table 3

Homicide rate per 100,000 population, 1950–1999

1950	4.6
1960	5.1
1970	7.9
1980	10.2
1990	9.4
1991	9.8
1992	9.3
1993	9.5
1994	9.0
1995	8.2
1996	7.4
1997	6.8
1998	6.3
1999	5.7

Most studies of progress in meeting our housing-related needs have focused on physical amenities related to health. Such progress has been substantial; greater percentages of the population live in physically adequate housing. For instance, in 1940 20% of dwellings in the U.S. housed more than one person per room, and 45% of dwellings lacked adequate plumbing facilities (e.g., indoor toilets); by 1995, only 2.6% of dwellings housed more than one person per room, and only 2.3% of dwellings lacked complete plumbing facilities. Although these and other indicators show that larger proportions of Americans have met certain housing needs—in fact, many have more opulent housing than they need—the full picture concerning housing needs requires scrutiny of other areas of functioning: those of safe neighborhoods and of access to good public schools.

Access to good neighborhoods and good schools vastly exceeds the cost of access to healthy and decent housing. Until recently, one might have assumed that the most costly of all is the access to safe neighborhoods. But with the decline in crime in the past few years, some might conclude that we are relatively safe from crime. But what does this mean? Certainly there has been recent progress. Data compiled by the Department of Justice (and shown in Table 3) reveal a steady rise in homicides from the 1950s that lasted into the mid-1990s—the lowest year was 1957, with a rate of 4.0 homicides per 100,000. Then, in 1996, after twenty-five years with homicide rates above 8 per 100,000—homicides fell to 7.4 and have fallen every

year since then. The 1999 rate of 5.7 was the lowest rate since 1966, when the rate was 5.6.

These figures mask enormous differences when homicide victimization is considered by income and race. Data from the past twenty-five years reveals that a black person is six times more likely to be a homicide victim than a white person—but *not* if that black person lives in an upper-middle-class neighborhood.

Safety depends in large part on neighborhood, but how safe is safe enough? In *Graceful Simplicity*, I defined a safe neighborhood subjectively, in terms of a “go out and play” standard. Is the neighborhood safe enough to tell our children, as our parents told us, to “go out and play”? Of course, this standard lacks precision, and it may be that parents’ willingness to actually say this varies enormously across the income spectrum. Thus, it might turn out that upper-middle-class parents would never allow any children to “go out and play” in most of the city neighborhoods inhabited by the bottom half of the income spectrum.

Nonetheless, what I have in mind, as a middle class parent with an income around the boundary between the fourth and fifth quintiles (in the year 2000 the upper limit of the 4th quintile was \$91,700) is intuitively clear to me. In my neighborhood, a child under the age of ten would not be allowed outside for more than a few moments without supervision. But I can identify neighborhoods in nearby areas where neither I nor my neighbors would feel this way, and I have a good idea of what houses cost in those neighborhoods. Extrapolating from these admittedly subjective intu-

itions allows me to say with some confidence that in the area in which I live (inside the Washington, D.C. Beltway), most families—surely at least 3/4ths—don't live at the "go out and play" standard of living.

Continuing with the Washington, D.C. Beltway area as an example, I estimate that meeting the "go out and play" standard requires one to live in neighborhoods in which homes cost \$300,000 or more. Thus, the annual shelter cost (e.g., mortgage interest, taxes, insurance, maintenance) of entry into such neighborhoods far exceeds the \$13,100 expenditure level for shelter of the top 1/5 of households.

As this example shows, spending the *least amount necessary* to attain one particular element in the housing standard may result in purchasing goods that are *vastly more expensive* than is necessary to attain other elements. To live in a safe neighborhood with access to good public schools may mean purchasing a \$350,000 home with amenities far beyond anything required to meet health or decency requirements. The home may have fifty percent more floor space or far more bedrooms than one needs. Efforts to set "needs budgets" have often set income needs for housing at an unduly low level—such budgets typically consider the cost of homes with adequate floor space, but ignore access to adequate schools.

The fact that a needs budget might involve costs that exceed the income constraints of most of the population is a rather unsettling outcome. In the over a century-old history of such budgets—whether called "basic needs budgets," "health and decency budgets" or "living wage budgets"—the cost of meeting needs has fallen somewhere below the level of median income. The reason for this, I believe, lies in an implicit pragmatism. The purpose of these budget exercises was to help set wage levels, or to set policy for welfare programs or to set eligibility standards for various forms of economic subsidies. If the budgets generated figures that were completely out of the question for such purposes, then their own *raison d'être* would be undermined. After all, what good does it do to come up with a "living wage" level of \$50 per hour, or to reach the conclusion that to meet core needs in America a family needs \$150,000, or some other extraordinary sum?

Yet I would argue that there is a value in specifying needs independently of a preconceived sense of the answers. If, as we have seen, the willingness to speak about the cost of living in a safe neighborhood with good public schools leads us to conclude that 80% of American families lack the income to satisfy fairly basic

needs, this suggests that the answer is not to be found in higher incomes. Indeed, it opens the door to the idea that the pursuit of higher levels of individual income to satisfy family needs may be a particularly inefficient way for a society to seek to satisfy needs. In the housing example, even if everyone's income suddenly were raised to \$150,000, the effect would not be that everyone would be able to live in a safe neighborhood with good public schools—rather, the higher incomes would result in bidding up the price of housing in the good neighborhoods to market clearing levels. The problem for each individual might be inadequate effective demand, but the solution for all doesn't lie in increasing everyone's effective demand. It lies in increasing the supply of good schools and safe streets.

Solving this problem is obviously a difficult task. Yet it might help if generally we stopped thinking about basic needs problems as distinctly the problems of low income groups. Indeed, it might help if we stopped assuming that needs problems are essentially income problems. Indeed, it may be that our culture's focus on income is itself part of the problem—it reinforces the notion that the key to overcoming problems is to earn enough to move away from them. Heretically, one might even suggest that what we need to address our problems is less disposable income, and more collective spending. Yes, higher taxes!

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Sources: Useful data have been derived from the U.S. Department of Labor's 1959 work, *How American Buying Habits Change*; data on housing adequacy are adapted from Tables in *Calvert-Henderson Quality of Life Indicators*, edited by Hazel Henderson, Jon Lickerman, and Patrice Flynn (Calvert Group, 2000); homicide data are from James Alan Fox and Marianne W. Zawitz, "Homicide Trends in the United States," U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics (January 4, 2001), which is available at www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs; Jerome M. Segal, *Graceful Simplicity: Toward a Philosophy and Politics of Simple Living* (Henry Holt, 1999). Parts of this article were adapted from a study Dr. Segal did for Redefining Progress, "Consumption and the Cost of Meeting Household Needs in the Twentieth Century."

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On the Value of Natural Ecosystems: The Catskills Parable

Mark Sagoff

Mr. Douglas Tomkins, founder of two clothing companies, North Face and Esprit, says he “made way too much money” in these businesses. “Before I was a businessman, I was a mountaineer, and I came to know and love some of the world’s wildest, most beautiful remaining places.” In 1990, he says, “I sold all my business interests, immersed myself in the literature of deep ecology[,] . . . and have for the last twelve years spent virtually all my resources—time and money—to protect wild nature.”

Tomkins has purchased about 800,000 acres of land in Chile to form a nature reserve protecting, among many other natural wonders, about thirty-five percent of Chile’s remaining *alerce*, a gigantic tree that can live for 4,000 years. The wilderness forests could have been harvested for pulp. Some of the land, once clear-cut, might have been farmed to provide fresh produce for winter consumption in the United States. Fjords there might have served as sites for salmon aquaculture. According to Adriana Delpiano, Chile’s Minister of National Property, “Chile already has 2.5 million acres of national parks, and we don’t need any more.” She and others complain that Tomkin’s nature reserve ties up too much resource-rich “land that could be used for development.”

An Economic Rationale for Preservation

In the United States, the conflict between preservation and development is an old story. For more than a century, preservationists have offered ethical and spiritual rather than economic arguments for protecting natural areas. John Muir, for example, sought to protect nature in spite of instrumental values, not because of them. Muir condemned the “temple destroyers, devotees of ravaging commercialism” who “instead of lifting their eyes to the God of the mountains, lift them to the Almighty dollar.”

A century ago, the battle over the damming of Hetch Hetchy, a spectacular valley carved from the Sierras by glaciers and the Tuolumne River, pitted those, like Muir, who loved nature for its intrinsic qualities against

those, like Gifford Pinchot, who valued it at least as much for the uses to which it could be put. Pinchot, who had headed the Forest Service, would dedicate even Hetch Hetchy to human material benefit—in this instance, by turning it into a watering hole for San Francisco. Pinchot argued it would be irrational to keep the valley “untouched for the benefit of a very small number of well-to-do to whom it would be accessible.” Muir countered with a moral conviction, not an economic calculation. Society had a moral and religious duty to respect so sacred and spectacular a monument. “Dam Hetch Hetchy! As well dam for water-tanks the people’s cathedrals and churches, for no holier temple has ever been consecrated by the heart of man.”

For more than a century, preservationists have offered ethical and spiritual rather than economic arguments for protecting natural areas.

Traditionally, those like Pinchot who have favored economic development have argued that technological intervention is usually required to obtain “services” from natural ecosystems, the way the construction of a dam realized the potential of Hetch Hetchy to serve as a water tank. To get the benefit of nature’s services is often to plow a field, dig a canal, build a road, drill a well, or alter a genome. To turn on a light switch, to purchase fresh produce year-round, to drive a car, or to dwell in a house is to depend not so much on nature directly but on technologies that lift the cup of nature to the lip of consumption.

Preservationists traditionally have avoided the economic approach to valuing ecosystems. They have tended to see and describe nature as a refuge from economic activity rather than as a resource for it, and they have characteristically appealed to the intrinsic, not the instrumental, value of nature, such as a remote wilderness or rare species, to justify the economic sacrifices often needed to protect it.

Today, many environmental activists, including many scientists, stand the traditional development-versus-preservation debate on its head by arguing that ecosystems should be preserved in their natural condition *for* rather than *in spite of* economic values and concerns. They argue that unspoiled nature provides long-term economic benefits that offset the short-term disadvantages involved in forgoing development. Environmental scientists argue that wild and natural ecosystems provide directly for our needs and, therefore, that we have sound instrumental reasons to leave nature alone. "Humanity obtains from natural ecosystems an array of ecosystem goods—organisms and their parts and products that grow in the wild and that are used directly for human benefit." Unfortunately, a "lack of awareness" of the economic value of undisturbed ecosystems "helps drive the conversion of natural ecosystems to human-dominated systems (e.g., wheatlands or oil palm fields)." These scientists may agree with Muir in valuing nature for aesthetic, ethical, and spiritual reasons, but like Pinchot they favor economic arguments, possibly because they regard them as more effective. In the words of one, "The ethical arguments for saving biodiversity and the environment are not winning the war."

The Catskills Parable

Ecologists and other environmental scientists understand the power of examples. They know it is easy to find examples of human-dominated ecosystems—farms, homes, resorts—that may appear more serviceable than, say, the wild savannas, wetlands, or forests they have replaced. To be sure, the Nature Conservancy and other groups and individuals have acquired millions of acres of America's "last great places" to protect them from development. These groups and individuals, however, respond to the intrinsic values, such as the beauty, age, and spiritual quality, they find in the landscapes they seek to retire from economic exploitation. What is wanted is an example that illustrates the economic or instrumental value of ecosystems left in a relatively natural, wild, or undisturbed state.

During the past few years, scientists have presented a telling example to illustrate the economic rationale for preserving wild or natural ecosystems. In the literature of environmental policy and science, this example more than any other presents evidence of the economic benefits that land in its natural state can provide.

In 1998, in "fundamentally important work," two scholars "powerfully demonstrated through economic arguments" the value of undeveloped nature. In a now routinely cited commentary in *Nature*, Graciela Chichilnisky and Geoffrey Heal, economists at Columbia University, wrote, "In 1996, New York City

invested between \$1 billion and \$1.5 billion in natural capital, in the expectation of producing cost savings of \$6 billion–\$8 over 10 years." These authors explained, "New York City has floated an 'environmental bond issue' and will use the proceeds to restore the functioning of the watershed ecosystems responsible for water purification. . . ." Commentators have argued that this decision "demonstrated how New York City realized billions of dollars in economic benefits by sustaining the Catskills watershed as a water filtration system, rather than . . . building a new filtration plant."

The belief that New York City, to restore the purity of its water supply, has paid around \$1 billion to purchase and preserve land in the Catskills has led many scientists to accept an intuitively appealing hypothesis: we benefit more when we preserve nature than when we develop or cultivate it. Many scientists, including those on prestigious boards and panels, have elaborated this idea. An eminent biologist recently has explained that, for generations, New York City received plenty of clean water from Catskills communities. "As their population grew, however, they converted more and more of the watershed forest into farms, homes, and resorts." As a result, "the sewage and agricultural runoff adulterated the water, until it fell below Environmental Protection Agency [EPA]

Today, many environmental activists . . . stand the traditional development-versus-preservation debate on its head by arguing that ecosystems should be preserved in their natural condition for rather than in spite of economic values and concerns.

standards. Officials in New York City now faced a choice. They could build a filtration plant to replace the Catskill watershed, at a \$6 billion to \$8 billion capital cost, followed by \$300 million annual running costs, or they could restore the watershed to somewhere near its original purification capacity for \$1 billion."

The National Science Board of the National Science Foundation, in calling for research into the services ecosystems provide, now notes at its Web site that historically the watershed of the Catskill Mountains filtered and purified water for New York City:

Over time, this watershed ecosystem became overwhelmed by sewage, industrial and agricultural runoff to the point that the water quality in the city fell below EPA drinking water standards. An economic analysis provided costs of two alternatives for restoring water quality. The cost of purchasing and restoring the watershed so that it could continue to provide the service of purification and filtration was calculated to be \$1 billion. The cost of building and maintaining a water purification and filtration plant was \$6–8 billion in capital costs, plus annual operating expenses of \$300 million. The City has opted to buy and restore the watershed, i.e., to let nature work for people.



"This isn't tap water, is it?"

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A panel of scientists, in a paper published at the Ecological Society of America (ESA) Web site, repeats the same argument, reflecting the view of many ecologists that the City could best secure the purification services of natural ecosystems by withholding land from development. The panel argues that "preserving habitat in the watershed and letting the ecosystem do the work of cleansing the water" is "as effective as a new filtration plant. Habitat preservation and restoration costs one-fifth the price of a new filtration plant, avoids hundreds of millions of dollars in annual maintenance costs, and provides many other ecological and social benefits to the region."

Chichilnisky and Heal, in the original paper that provided the source of this information, wrote that in the Catskills, natural processes in the past "were sufficient to cleanse the water to standards required" by the EPA. "But sewage, fertilizer and pesticides in the soil reduced the efficiency of this process to the point where New York City's water no longer met EPA standards." As Chichilnisky and Heal continued, "The city was faced with the choice of restoring the integrity of the Catskill ecosystems or of building a filtration plant at a capital cost of \$6 billion–\$8 billion, plus running costs of the order of \$300 million annually. In other

words, New York had to invest in natural capital or in physical capital. Which was more attractive?"

A century ago, perhaps, one might have agreed with Pinchot that society had to invest in physical capital, *i.e.*, technological infrastructure, to transform nature for human purposes, turning wetlands into farms or savannas into cities, constructing dams, tunnels, pipes, and treatment plants. The Catskills parable, as heretofore related, has taught the contrary lesson.

Problems with the Parable

The story that New York City paid about \$1 billion to restore or preserve the Catskills watershed is now often cited to show that ecological services can justify the preservation of nature even against well-designed development. Yet, the original paper cites no source as evidence for this story. An exhaustive study the National Research Council (NRC) published in 2000 found that the quality of New York City water had not declined in recent years. "Source water and drinking water in New York City are in compliance" with standards set by the Safe Drinking Water Act, the study reported, and "[t]he Catskill/Delaware water supply currently meets all necessary criteria."

Nor is it evident that natural purification processes until recently “were sufficient to cleanse the water to standards required” by the EPA, as the original paper stated. Since 1910, the City has relied on chlorine to disinfect its water supply. The chlorine residues are so infinitesimal that the City easily complies with the residual standard for free chlorine and “little difficulty is expected meeting this requirement in the future as long as the City maintains its current disinfection practice.”

The Catskills watershed acts like a huge cistern that collects rain water, which is then captured in the reservoirs made by dams. It is not clear that rain water needs to be purified or filtered by the Catskills ecosystem. Actually, rain water approximates distilled water, albeit acidified distilled water in the northeastern United States, so impurities and surely pathogenic microorganisms are more likely to come *from*, rather than to be removed *by*, the landscape onto which rain water falls.

Through a complex of dams, reservoirs, aqueducts, pipes, and tunnels, New York City draws most of its water supply from 1,600 square miles in the Catskills

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and Delaware watersheds. Working farms now occupy less than five percent of the watershed, and older farms, unable to compete with dairy and other operations farther west, are now largely reforested. Industrial and dense residential activity each account for less than one percent of the land use; most of the area is forest (68 percent) or otherwise vacant (10 percent). According to the NRC study, the population of the Catskills watershed has hardly changed from what it was at the time of the Civil War. “In fact, the 1990 watershed population exceeded the estimated 1860 population by just 235 persons.”

The NRC study does note that microbes pathogenic to humans have increased enough from one source in the watershed in recent years to pose a serious problem. That source is wildlife. “Once extirpated from the region by marked hunting and trapping, white-tailed deer and beaver have rebounded during the last century.” In regions where there is no livestock, “the background contamination from wildlife populations is apparent,” and increases in fecal coliform bacteria, when observed in the principal reservoir, “coincided both spatially and temporally” with increases in water-

fowl populations. If water quality was to be assured, “Beaver populations may require active management in some parts of the watershed.”

If the quality of the water supplied to New York City had fallen below EPA standards, then people would have been in jeopardy. Fortunately, both source water and drinking water have remained in compliance with all necessary standards, according to the NRC. The statement that the “watershed ecosystem became overwhelmed by sewage, industrial and agricultural runoff to the point that the water quality in the city fell below EPA drinking water standards,” has no identified foundation with respect to the Catskills watershed. In the Croton area, which provides about a tenth of the water supply, quality did decline, but New York City immediately opted to build a filtration plant at a cost of nearly \$700 million rather than to buy up or preserve watershed ecosystems.

Nor is there an evident basis for the statement that “New York City has floated an ‘environmental bond issue’ and will use the proceeds to restore the functioning of the watershed ecosystems responsible for water purification.” A study of the archives of the New York City Municipal Water Finance Authority indicates no such bond issue, and a telephone interview with the Authority’s Director of Investment Relations confirmed that there was none. In 1997, New York State authorized the Clean Water, Clean Air Bond Act, which committed \$1.75 billion to a variety of environmental projects statewide but earmarked no funds for land acquisition in the Catskills, though some of the money could have been or still might be used that way.

If its water had not fallen from compliance with EPA standards, why did the City face a choice between 1) investing “between \$1 billion and \$1.5 billion in natural capital,” supposedly the cost of purchasing and restoring the watershed, and 2) “building a filtration plant at a capital cost of \$6 billion–\$8 billion, plus running costs of the order of \$300 million annually”? Nothing had changed with respect to the safety or the quality of the City’s water supply. The significant change took place not in the City or in its watershed but in Washington, D.C. What changed were specific regulations and the regulatory approach EPA adopted toward water treatment and watershed management.

On June 29, 1989, EPA promulgated the Surface Water Treatment Rule (SWTR), which, indeed, confronted New York City with a choice. The SWTR required that every surface-water system serving more than 10,000 people, no matter how clean or safe its water, either filter that water or successfully petition to EPA for a “filtration avoidance determination” (FAD). This requirement had nothing to do with New York City in particular; its water remained excellent. The SWTR applied nationwide and was intended largely to deal with *Cryptosporidium parvum*, a microbe that sur-

vives chlorination and in 1993, despite the SWTR, was to pose a serious problem in Milwaukee.

To comply with the STWR, the City could build a water filtration plant at a cost of \$6 billion, with maintenance costs of \$300 million annually. Since its water already met high standards for safety and quality, the City had little to gain from this course. *C. parvum* could have become a problem, however, with about 350 vertebrate species, many able to act as carriers, thriving in the watershed. The City, however, had already begun to experiment with ultraviolet irradiation, a recognized alternative to the filtration of water containing *C. parvum* and other chlorine-resistant pathogens.

Second, the City could—and did—petition for a FAD. On January 21, 1997, the City and EPA signed a Memorandum of Agreement that outlined steps the City would have to take to obtain a five-year filtration-avoidance determination, which it did receive. EPA, in keeping with the watershed management approach it had by then adopted, had to be assured that the City would respect and protect the value of nature's services. The City therefore committed itself to partner with landowners and communities to build infrastructure to make sure economic development would not impair water quality.

In applauding these aspects of the Agreement, the NRC committee thought that "moderate population growth and a wide range of new economic activities can be accommodated in the watershed without deleterious impacts on water quality as long as . . . infrastructure investments now being planned are put in place." These investments included subsidies for better sewage and septic systems and for improved farm

The extent of the City's habitat acquisition has disappointed environmentalists.

waste management. These investments make long-term precautionary sense, though there are, in the NRC's words, "few signs that rapid increases in economic activity are likely in the region."

Had the City invested only in "technological capital" or infrastructure and refused to acquire land for preservation, it might have affronted ecologists inside EPA and out who recommended, to quote the ESA panel, "preserving habitat in the watershed and letting the ecosystem do the work of cleansing the water." Since there was no scientific consensus about the amount of wildlife habitat that was needed to disinfect the water supply, however, the City and EPA had to make a political judgment about the number of acres the City would have to buy to satisfy those in author-

ity who believed that wildlife habitat provided purification services. In the Memorandum of Agreement, the City committed to buy no set amount of land but to solicit the purchase of 355,000 acres. The amount of habitat the City would actually have to preserve was left vague.

Since 1997, the City has made significant investments in dam and pipe renovations, waste-treatment and septic-system improvement, and farm-operations enhancements. The City has attempted to begin work on a controversial \$680 million water filtration plant it seeks to site in Van Cortlandt Park in the Bronx, and it

Even by 1997, the City had bought enough land—virtually none—to reveal its own working estimate of the economic value of the surface-water purification services provided by undeveloped terrestrial ecosystems.

has begun a multi-billion-dollar water tunnel project. In spite of the expectations of many environmentalists, it has not been as lavish, however, in the investments it has made in preserving wildlife habitat and biodiversity as a method purifying its water supply.

In fact, the extent of the City's habitat acquisition has disappointed environmentalists. In April 2001, an environmental group said the City "only secured a measly 36 acres of land surrounding the strategic reservoir—the Westchester County source for 90 percent of the city's drinking water." In a May 2000 report, EPA castigated the City for having bought only 17 undeveloped acres of the 1,000 available around a crucial reservoir in the Catskills system. As of October 29, 2001, New York City had completed the purchase of only 17,250 acres across the entire watershed, most not by acquisition but through conservation easements. A phone interview with City officials determined that as of the following February, only 19,200 acres had been purchased, at a cost of \$63.8 million. After September 11, 2001, the need to secure land around reservoirs as a protection against terrorism became evident, and land acquisitions could serve this purpose, yet the City has capped at \$260 million the amount it may eventually spend.

The City is likely to see its FAD renewed even if it does not pick up the desultory pace of its investments in land reserves. It is apparent, however, that even by 1997, the City had bought enough land—virtually none—to reveal its own working estimate of the economic value of the surface-water purification services provided by undeveloped terrestrial ecosystems. Environmental scientists and others gave their version of this estimate. A document on the ESA Web site announced, "In 1996, New York City invested more

than a billion dollars to buy land and restore habitat in the Catskill Mountains, the source of the city's fresh water supply." This was one of many publications that repeated, elaborated, and amplified the account published in *Nature* in 1998 without relevant references, citations, or sources.

The Nature in Nature's Services

To understand the economic value of nature's services, one must define what it is to which the term "nature" refers. The term "nature," as John Stuart Mill wrote, can refer to either of two things. First, the term may denote "the aggregate of the powers and properties of all things. Nature means the sum of all phenomena, together with the causes which produce them; including not only all that happens, but all that is capable of happening." In this sense, the opposite of the "natural" is the "supernatural." The failure of Biosphere II demonstrates the instrumental value of nature in this sense, if proof were needed. No one thinks that society can rely on technology to replace nature in the sense of everything under the sun plus the sun itself.

The term "nature" may also mean "not everything which happens, but only what takes place without the agency, or without the voluntary and intentional agency, of man." The opposite of the "natural" in this sense is the "artificial." The Catskills watershed constitutes a natural ecosystem in this sense just to the extent it follows its spontaneous course unhindered by human intervention or agency. To control beaver or deer populations, to build dams, canals, and pipes, or to apply chlorine is intentionally to alter nature's spontaneous course. The resulting goods and services can no longer be characterized as "natural" in the second sense of the term but only in the first.

Those who emphasize the economic value of nature's goods and services generally use the term "nature" in the second sense. According to a paper published by the RAND Corporation, "ecosystem services are the processes through which natural ecosystems, and the plants, animals and microbes that live in those environments, sustain human life." This definition excludes agriculture, silviculture, and aquaculture, sewage treatment plants, and any service that depends on humanity's manipulation of nature's course. As its principal example of the value of natural ecosystems, the RAND study points to the "natural filtration services" the Catskills watershed provides New York City.

The Catskills parable has become ubiquitous because it offers a clear illustration of the thesis that nature in the second sense—undeveloped nature—provides services spontaneously and that human manipulation, intervention, or transformation cannot

Civil Society, Democracy, and Civic Renewal

Robert K. Fullinwider, Editor

Civic society is receiving renewed attention from academics, politicians, journalists, community leaders, and participants in the voluntary sector. *Civil Society, Democracy, and Civic Renewal* brings together several of America's leading scholars—of history, sociology, political science, and philosophy—to explore the meaning of civil society, its positive and negative effects, its relation to government, and its contribution to democracy.

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improve and therefore can only diminish those services. The demonstrative power of this parable may explain the reluctance of many environmental scientists to question it. Yet by accepting examples of this sort hastily, environmentalists may eventually lose in credibility what they initially may gain in persuasiveness. By relying on economic or instrumental arguments, moreover, environmentalists appear to join

those who, according to Muir, "instead of lifting their eyes to the God of the mountains, lift them to the Almighty dollar." They appeal to an instrumental ethic likely in the end to defeat them.

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The Realist Illusion, a Patriarchal Reality, and the Plight of Osama the Pirate

Robert Hunt Sprinkle

At the Conservative Party Conference at Blackpool, England, in October 1999, Baroness Margaret Thatcher, once a barrister and later illustrious as Prime Minister of Great Britain and commander-in-chief of British forces in the Falklands War, condemned the house-arrest and then-impending extradition of another former commander-in-chief, Augusto Pinochet. He had come to London for back surgery and been detained postoperatively for crimes against humanity, their multiplicity pared down to torture. She made her case standing before a huge projection of a grandfatherly Pinochet warmly cuddling a child. Whatever he may have done, the implication seemed to be, he had done as a patriarch. He had been acting within and for his family, which, plausibly enough, was Chile. Awkwardly for Lady Thatcher's purpose, the slim slices of humanity against which some of Pinochet's deeds constituted arguably actionable crimes had included members of families less plausibly his own.

Pinochet was trying to evade extradition not to Chile, where he still expected to be secure, but to Spain and perhaps then to other states, each offended either by the murder of its nationals in Chile or the murder of Chilean nationals on its territory. In the end, after sixteen months, Pinochet got home not through a claim of innocence or extenuation or immunity, nor through a hole in national or international law. Rather, he got home through a claim of mental incapacity, a claim Britain's Home Secretary seemed determined to accept. Pinochet's spry walk and bright behavior at welcoming ceremonies in Santiago suggested that the true incapacity in this affair was not mental and not his.

Lady Thatcher's visually patriarchist defense recapitulated in forensic cliché one side of a long and harsh debate distinguished by the brilliance of its major protagonists, the inadequacies of their proofs, and the mundane ubiquity of the behavior discussed. Indeed, as to this last point, most beneficiaries of patriarchal privilege have not been heads of state engaged in civil rivalry or foreign war; they have been heads of household. The penalty for abusing one's own slave, spouse, or child, even fatally, has immemorially been lighter

than for likewise maltreating a free-born neighbor or stranger. Even in advanced societies, innumerable victims, their rights to asylum waived fatalistically or revoked procedurally, have died following "repatriation" to brutal homes.

Great crime-like acts of state, of course, seem altogether distinct, for reasons jurisdictional, substantive, and stylistic, surely, but also because they are, demonstrably, *great*. They could not be accomplished without the durable allegiance of an audacious cohort and the forbearance of most everyone else. Their very accomplishment, consequently, is evidence of moral authority, and, however malevolently used, moral authority makes a difference. Realistically, and to realists, it can make prerogative.

The spirit conjured at Blackpool is easy to sense and hard to dispel. It routinely leads us to presume that power within a family—or within a community, corporation, or nation—signifies moral authority, that no family's business is the business of others, and that

Great crime-like acts of state, of course, seem altogether distinct, for reasons jurisdictional, substantive, and stylistic, surely, but also because they are, demonstrably, great.

most any measure taken to smooth a family's functioning or to defend one family from another, perhaps simply to advance one beyond another, is taken justly. A contrary spirit, more welcome in temperate airs but quick to vanish when temperate turns torrid, objects that no one in any family deserves to be abused, that the suppression of abuse is the business of any and all, and that the moral licenses issued for governance and competition are limited. The first spirit calls anarchy to order. The second calls patriarchy to account. The tension between them is ageless, and their conflict has long complicated politics.

The apprehension, indictment, prosecution, and punishment of major political criminals has rarely been straightforward, even when facilitated by collapse of the

conspiracies the criminals once led or served. Intervention to stop, suppress, or prevent major political crimes, ranging from cross-border aggression to within-border persecution, has rarely been easy to organize, notwithstanding evident capacity to act successfully at acceptable cost. Efforts to speed political development through the installation of liberal civil procedures ignoring or demeaning indigenous modes of legitimation have so often ended badly as to make "nation building," as a progressive policy, notorious. Political and economic relations with internally abusive states have regularly become confused, sometimes through the diplomatically ordinary conflation of government with governed, sometimes through the personalization of state-to-state contact.

Not only have such frustrations occurred in temporary circumstances promising logically to obviate them, but they also still occur frequently today despite an emboldening of liberal expectations worldwide. Explanations have typically centered on weaknesses in international legal regimes, disincentives to collective action, and perversities in political culture.

Other explanations might prove usefully complementary. This essay considers two, both evoked by arguments in seventeenth-century political philosophy. The first, a once-momentous topic long shunned as a scholarly embarrassment, is *patriarchal privilege*. The second is, as I have called it, *the realist illusion*, which depends psychologically, just as it does rhetorically, on a presumption of moral anarchy among artificial persons. The two may merge, and merge fatefully, for in the realist illusion patriarchal features, and other features as well, are chronically, convincingly, and dangerously misperceived. The realist illusion is very old, patriarchal privilege far older.

A Lost Argument

Politics may have had its origins in a state of nature, but not one with humans in it. Politics, apparently, long antedated our own speciation. Structured observation of nonhuman animals, and most provocatively nonhuman primates, reveals behaviors readily analogous to the politics described within and between, if not among, human groups.

Of singular interest is what modern behavioral primatology suggests about the essence of moral authority. What we express by "moral authority," even by "legitimacy," clearly has an evolutionary meaning, one understood with species-specific variation throughout, and well beyond, the primate order. What we express by these terms is evidently *innate* to some substantial degree, its motivational pressure felt by individuals *as* individuals. Put differently, moral authority *in* a group may be recognizable from outside that group—or from outside any group. If so, then intragroup moral authority has an extra-group reference and legitimacy a standard, one fundamental to custom and law and only in elaboration and peculiarity their artifact.

Among the English *virtuosi* of the seventeenth century's Scientific Revolution, natural philosophy and political philosophy were accepted as having a common origin, yet the existence of innate ideas,

including innate moral ideas, was denied. A prominent physician, John Locke, whom England's rising Lord High Chancellor correctly credited with both the rejuvenation of his health and the maturation of his thought, claimed that the human mind was a "white Paper" at birth, that we were expelled from the womb ready to learn but knowing nothing.



Former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher speaking at a pro-Pinochet rally in Blackpool, England, held on October 6, 1999. Thatcher gave an impassioned plea for the release of General Augusto Pinochet, who was in Britain fighting a Spanish attempt to extradite him to stand trial for grave human rights abuses during his regime.
(AP Wide World Photo/Alastair Grant)

Like other animals, humans did, though, have “natural tendencies.” Locke’s error—a scientific one, really, more than a metaphysical—lay not in ignoring natural tendencies but in disregarding their foundational role in the building of ideas, especially moral ideas, and the behaviors grounded upon them.

That said, and giving virtuosity its due, perhaps this “error” was strategic. Locke’s principal goal, after all, was not dismissal of the innateness doctrine but dismissal of the *patriarchal* doctrine it made plausible.

However deeply submerged it may be in the flow of political progress, patriarchy remains in ebbing tides a hazard to moral navigation.

In the 1630s, Sir Robert Filmer, a gentleman of Kent, had begun circulating among his friends an argument no contractarian, no consent theorist, authoritarian or liberal, could like. Some of his work had entered publication over succeeding decades but with little notice or effect. Then, in 1680, the author long dead but the Stuart Restoration desperate for rhetorical defense, royalist operatives arranged to publish Filmer’s major work, *Patriarcha: The Natural Power of Kings Defended Against the Unnatural Liberty of the People*. Reception within the aristocracy—in Virginia no less than in England—was resounding.

Filmer, like all his contemporaries, knew no natural history whatsoever, nor even that there was a primate order, let alone one in which he held membership. But he did still have a sense of political-behavioral inheritance, however unlikely we might now judge his version of its origin and descent, and he was offended by the increasingly clamorous argument that all people were somehow naturally free-born and were therefore free to choose, to form, and even to invent and dismiss their own governments. “Consent” was the key.

Filmer objected that consent was a fable in politics and a fraud in political theory. Politics, law, and legitimacy itself were first seen in families and retained all their naturalistic features even as families became nations. Consent had nothing to do with this process, as was evident in human history, whose long premodern phase, fully recorded and open to inspection in the Old Testament, and more recent phase, profusely described in secular chronicles, demonstrated beyond questioning that patriarchy and, thus, monarchy were ineluctable. Occasional dalliances with democracy had proved this through the uniformity of their failure. Consent was a secular creation myth, a rationalization disrespectful of scripture, contemptuous of history, alienated from experience, and ruinous in prospect.

Filmer’s core argument was no novelty, nor were attacks on its more familiar features unknown. Yet in

the England of 1680, *Patriarcha* was a weapon, its publication a sly move, a signal event. For liberals it was a threat, for consent theorists and natural-law romantics a well-earned minor rhetorical embarrassment. For John Locke, both as celebrated physician and epistemologist and as anonymous political philosopher, it was a high-priority target. Filmer’s exposition had been awkwardly and unnecessarily scriptural, and Locke took full advantage, thrust after thrust spearing exegetic pretense and the royalist intellectualism standing behind it. Locke’s *Second Treatise*, with a consent-theory garden scene explicit enough to excite yet demure enough not to embarrass, further advanced the edge of liberalism, anticipating its famous declarations and roughing out its lasting institutions.

Oddly, then, Filmer’s antiquated argument, “the most refuted theory of politics in the [English] language,” seems in one key element—its observational premise—more modern than the consent-theory consensus that banished it. Indeed, if secularized, generalized, simplified, made descriptive rather than prescriptive, recast to be objective and falsifiable, and trucked off from philosophy to evolutionary psychology, it would today seem unexceptional, a piece of “normal science,” a researchable hypothesis: patriarchy or matriarchy, one or the other, is the organizational and moral norm in the primate order. To this hypothesis we may add a corollary for ourselves alone, for *Homo sapiens*: however deeply submerged it may be in the flow of political progress, patriarchy remains in ebbing tides a hazard to moral navigation.

An Honored Error

One such ebbing tide had left Thomas Hobbes in Paris during the English Civil War. Born, like Filmer, in the year of the Great Armada, coming to adulthood in the first years of the Stuart dynasty in England, Hobbes in his maturity watched his country disintegrate. It became his life’s work to prevent another such catastrophe, another grand fratricide, by elaborating a true science of politics through whose practice England and other Protestant Christian states, many just emerging from the Thirty Years’ War, could ensure domestic stability. In 1651, out of a long exile, Hobbes published the third and lasting version of his own—and the first ever—political science, *Leviathan, or The Matter, Forme, & Power of a Common-wealth Ecclesiasticall and Civill*. It “was occasioned by the disorders of the present time,” wrote its author, and fit its purpose well.

Modern presentations of realist theory are almost exclusively international in focus—not intranational, not transnational, not intracorporate, and just occasionally intercorporate. They all pivot on an assumption of anarchy. Analysis of state behavior cannot be

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"reduced" to analyses of human behavior or internal state structure since states exist in an anarchical "system" disciplined by no common and supreme ruler. Relative state power determines the pattern of international initiative and dictates the terms of dispute resolution, and rational-choice decision-making guarantees an "ethic" of self-interest and self-help. It is the anarchy assumption that allows modern realist theory to turn smoothly away from global ethical obligation, and it was in *Leviathan's* oft-quoted Chapter 13, its state-of-nature chapter, that the anarchy assumption first found clear expression.

Unlike Filmer, Hobbes set out to redefine legitimacy, to *re-derive* it, and not scripturally but "scientifically," even mechanically—from "motion," no less. His goal was civil stability, and that, he claimed, required political absolutism. Unanimous consent, which could be historical and could even be assumed, rather than elicited, brought political absolutism into line with an idealized parliamentary sovereignty, and majority rule

Modern presentations of realist theory are almost exclusively international in focus. . . . They all pivot on an assumption of anarchy.

could make of such a sovereignty a single being with a clear mind. Political absolutism, however realized, required national autonomy, which in turn required the discrediting of Roman Catholicism, Hobbes's obsession, and collaterally all secular catholicisms as well.

Thus was moral universalism condemned, but inconsistently. In more famous passages it was condemned as fiction, but in less-read reaches of the book as anything but fiction—indeed, as the main cause of domestic discord. Here, as if to reward the relentlessness of the reader, Hobbes admitted that the reason he placed sovereign action outside the bounds of moral judgment was not that he truly believed in or had proved the ethical rightness of such an exemption. Not at all. He had simply decided that the no-moral-judgment rule was necessary to maintain domestic stability—a consequentialist escape from deontology.

Patriarcha was no match for *Leviathan* philosophically or artistically, and neither one was a match for the *Two Treatises* politically—or for the flow of events. *Patriarcha's* most intriguing feature, its protoanthropological critique of consent theory, was swept aside in a general Western rush toward liberalism. With divine-right rule the deadest of secular letters but gender inequity at last a respected complaint, the patriarchist view now appears far less dangerous than long ago

but in important ways decidedly more offensive. *Patriarcha's* absolutist legacy, of course, has been almost wholly obscured by *Leviathan's*, which itself has held honors only in the theory of international relations, where its author's interest was roundabout. But it *has* held them there.

A Complicating Simplification

When at the close of the Second World War modern political realism scratched its way up through a rubble of failed hopes and false philosophies, international moral anarchy seemed, at once, everywhere and nowhere. The unregulated competition of nations had lately been flagrant, as was usual in war. Yet an alliance of nations, some of them democracies fighting for other democracies, had just overturned great evil at high cost. In Nuremberg, Tokyo, and Singapore, tribunals of that alliance were soon to judge the conduct of deposed leaders and surviving loyalists. And in San Francisco, New York, and Geneva, the alliance itself was about to become, supposedly, a global moral order.

As was soon enough apparent, though, morality was not about to be globalized. It was more nearly to be nationalized, or divided between alliances, holy and

Within the realist illusion moral judgment based on ordinary criteria seems unsuitable, since all protagonists are in every way imaginable extraordinary.

unholy, as if for a war of religion: liberal egalitarianism versus socialist authoritarianism. International life was looking as Hobbesian as ever, perhaps more so. Throughout the West analysts settled comfortably into the realist illusion, a perspective most often remembered from *Leviathan* but elaborated and greatly refined by later scholars, especially those of the Cold War.

Within the realist illusion moral judgment based on ordinary criteria seems unsuitable, since all protagonists are in every way imaginable extraordinary. They are not simple but compound, yet still for any practical purpose unitary and personifiable. They are not short-lived but persistent, even immortal; not law-abiding but law-giving unto themselves; not subject but self-determined and self-helping. They are jealous of power yet selfishly rational in its pursuit and application. They are leviathans rampant on a field of nations, and into them, into these artificial persons, these indispensable fictions, guilt diffuses, like blood into the sea. Competing nearby on less privileged ground are more

accountable giants, corporations: "lesser Commonwealths in the bowels of a greater, like wormes in the entrayles of a naturall man."

Guilt has origins, simple or otherwise, and spreads a traceable scent. In global political life, various forms of retribution, from informal score-settling and victor's justice to conscientiously conducted war-crimes trials and truth-commission proceedings, demonstrate the urge to individualize responsibility for past wrongs, at least recent ones. It is exactly this urge to individualize that the realist illusion ordinarily attenuates. The foremost exception over the last half century, an illusion-lifter for even the strictest of realists, has been genocide, an audacious family-killing hate crime whose *unindividualized* punishment, were it executed, would necessarily be collective, could fairly be condemned as retaliatory, and could easily come to resemble genocide itself.

The realist illusion . . . simplifies the formation of policy but obscures the truth that genuine individuals are at every chosen policy's sharp end.

Realism as theoretically informed practice has endured, even thrived, not just through extension but also, and more importantly, through restriction. Its most formidable antagonist, liberalism, has in leading countries conveniently blocked the forbidding old Hobbesian prospect of domestic authoritarianism, thus making realism safe for democracy—indeed, making realism potentially convincing as the *safeguard* of democracy at home. Liberalism has also helpfully superimposed upon the realist world-of-states view an international legal regime, often denigrated yet increasingly functional. The "modern liberal realist," to coin a term, may these days see all leviathans as foreign and may see the misbehaving ones less as threats to the sovereign independence of neighbor states than as threats to themselves, harming the "natural liberty of the people" denied illiberally by Filmer and, despite a presumption of consent, by Hobbes.

The realist illusion is an independent factor in a range of political behaviors, including many of the more troubling and less successful ones. As for more troubling, it simplifies the formation of policy but obscures the truth that genuine individuals are at every chosen policy's sharp end. As for less successful, it again simplifies but this time blurs the near-certainty that the policies of foreign governments will have been formed by individuals or factions themselves in competition with each other locally. Sometimes these effects interact, as when China's full inclusion in the

world's commerce was long opposed on human-rights grounds, the strategy having been to force "China," the indispensable fiction, to stop abusing "China," the composite corporeal fact.

Whether clarifying or confounding, the realist illusion is not peculiar to the leaders of political, military, and economic competitions or to the scholars of these competitions. It can also be perceived convincingly by citizens, soldiers, and employees, whose commitment to communal efforts and acceptance of collective fates make large-scale leadership and, hence, competition possible.

Moral authority may differentiate common thuggery from great crime-like acts of state, but what, other than nominal legality, would differentiate a great crime-like act of state from a great state-like act of crime?

"Commitment" and "acceptance"—how human these behaviors sound, how easily attributable to the making of a social contract, to the general and durable granting of consent. In fact, these behaviors *are* almost exclusively human, but not quite. In our very closest patriarchal relatives, chimpanzees and gorillas, just as in humans, dominated males tend to stay with, to stay committed to, to remain accepting of, their natal groups—their "nations," in the oldest sense of the word.

An Inverse Case

Though its historical analysis may yet come to rest upon subtleties not now appreciated, the Pinochet case has so far seemed a classic of patriarchal indulgence aggrandized by realist illusion. But what if its core distinguishing feature were inverted? Moral authority may differentiate common thuggery from great crime-like acts of state, but what, other than nominal legality, would differentiate a great crime-like act of state from a great state-like act of crime?

Osama bin Laden and the jihadists coordinated through al Qaeda avowedly considered their heinous initiatives in Africa, America, Asia, and Europe thoroughly legitimate, even holy. Many agents and fighters expected, intended, or even hoped to die as martyrs in boldly aggressive acts designed to make a peculiarly cultish interpretation of Islam more broadly appealing, respected, and feared; to secure Islam's ancient traditions against cultural erosion and doctrinal evolution; and to avenge indignities and injuries suffered by co-religionists worldwide. Few regulars in any armed service have ever fought as selflessly or for more rarefied ideas, and few have ever accepted the orders of their commanders as willingly.

Moral authority was not absent here, nor was courage. To its admirers, from Morocco to Mindanao, al Qaeda seemed legitimate enough, its attacks the righteous retribution of an offended faith, if not the self-assertions of a well-ordered state. Yet throughout the Koranic world no regime, except Afghanistan's deeply enthralled neo-medieval Taliban, offered al Qaeda more than the faintest and briefest support, at least not after September 11, 2001. Surely compelling was the incentive to align quickly with the United States in its impassioned new war against terror and terror's enablers, yet the ease with which backs were turned—not just to the man, the movement, and the method but also to the motive—was hard to foresee.

Osama bin Laden simply did not qualify for patriarchal indulgence, even among those who intermittently wished him some level of success. He may have been a patriarch in his own tent and in any group accepting his leadership or influence, and he was evidently patriarchal in the misogynistic sense, but he failed more specific tests.

Al Qaeda was no nation. Nor was it evocatively familial, despite reports that some number of its members, affiliates, and entourage were related by blood, marriage, or both. Each agent, each fighter, was, of course, *from* a family, but even collectively al Qaeda itself did not *form* a family, nor did it claim or seek a homeland—a place to settle, prosper, and procreate.

Al Qaeda was no nation. Nor was it evocatively familial, . . . al Qaeda could never become a state, though it might well overthrow one or two.

Ethnically various and polyglot beyond scripture, al Qaeda could never become a state, though it might well overthrow one or two.

Al Qaeda was a pirate crew, an all-volunteer assembly of rogue males banded together as privateers—in this instance, political privateers. In the cynical push-and-shove of local and global politics they might prove useful from time to time, but they were perennially hangable in any port, ultimately outside any sharable future, and immediately expendable.

The patriarchal argument was heard again, but against bin Laden, not for him. Correspondingly, and even from reliably hieratical interpreters of the realist illusion, the rights of states were sounding now more *earned* than intrinsic, more *revocable* than inalienable. For the time being, at any rate, the rights of states were less important than their responsibilities, and chief among these latter was the conscientious regulation of *internal* affairs. "People say, what does that mean? It

means they better get their house in order, is what it means," explained the President, a greater patriarch to all lesser patriarchs, virtually assembled.

A Summary Judgment

The realist illusion undervalues individuals in politics and individualism in political ethics, while patriarchal privilege assigns to prominent individuals an exceptional value, through the leverage of which they may act audaciously with a highly robust personal impunity. The realist illusion and patriarchal privilege, which may operate separately or together, are genuine psychological phenomena with clear evolutionary antecedents and numerous nonhuman analogues, most explicitly among our primate cousins. They are also regressive in that they interfere with the advancement and protection of human rights at the fundamental—the individual—level.

This discussion might be mistaken for a commentary on the perseverance of primitive thought. It appeals to primatological and anthropological observation. It reviews arguments from an era when conscientious people in leading countries took more seriously the political rights of royal pretenders than the human rights of women. It describes conduct found alike in preindustrial societies, atavistic states, and modern liberal alliances. Yet the persevering thought being discussed is not primitive so much as permanent, the manifestation of what may jarringly be called, in seventeenth-century terms, an innate idea.

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The Prospect of Internet Unionism

David Jacobs

The Internet permits nearly instantaneous contact across borders and promises to alter the ways in which business and politics are conducted. It aids communication among managers and permits the coordination of internationally-dispersed workplaces. It has provided impetus to the so-called “virtual workplace,” in which employees perform and coordinate their work on-line with a minimum of employer-supplied workspace. It has vastly simplified global stock transactions, sometimes permitting the circumvention of national laws.

The Internet has also contributed to the organization and mobilization of workers facing multinational corporations. It has compelled recalcitrant employers to acknowledge worker abuses. Similarly, it has permitted citizens to broadcast protests of government actions, to evade the limitations of government media, and to reach a global audience.

New economy enthusiasts conclude that the Internet contributes to a “creative destruction” that eventually will benefit everyone. The fate of ordinary workers, buffeted by change and uncertainty within their organizations, is ignored.

The Internet has had three kinds of effects on employee interests. First, the Internet contributes to “economizing,” the pursuit of efficiency through markets, sometimes at workers’ expense. Secondly, it allows unions and other social movements to pursue what sociologist Daniel Bell has termed the “sociologizing mode,” “the effort to judge a society’s needs in a more conscious fashion . . . on the basis of some explicit conception of the ‘public interest’.” Thirdly, the Internet places expert knowledge at the disposal of any worker and facilitates the production and distribution of goods without the intervention of management or middlemen, through what might be called the “praxis” effect.

Not all of the effects of the Internet on employee interests have been salutary and many have yet to

develop fully. It is therefore imperative to scrutinize more carefully the Internet’s prospects for workers and their unions.

Workers in the New Economy

Many popular accounts of the so-called “new economy” have inaccurately described the effects it has had—and will have—on workers. E-commerce enthusiasts tend to take the rising fortunes of some as evidence for the soundness of free market-based Internet development. From this perspective, only the entrepreneur’s success—however unrepresentative and fleeting—is significant. New economy enthusiasts conclude that the Internet contributes to a “creative destruction” that eventually will benefit everyone. The fate of ordinary workers, buffeted by change and uncertainty within their organizations, is ignored.

Some predict that organizations will “flatten,” as use of the Internet reduces the need for middle managers and staff positions. E-commerce enthusiasts also laud the information-sharing possibilities throughout the enterprise, creating a vastly more efficient workplace. Management scholars, N.F. Crandall and M.J. Wallace, for instance, describe the “virtual workplace” as

... bound neither by time nor space, where work gets done by people in harmony with technology to create goods and services on demand. There is a seamless interface among people working together in one place at one time, at different places and at different times, or any other combination that successfully meets customer requirements and demands. . . .

Digital optimists stress the Internet’s myriad efficiencies: enhanced communications and global reach with much reduced investments in physical infrastructure and labor costs. Microsoft Chair Bill Gates goes farther, promising a future without pain: a “frictionless capitalism” in which all—especially developing nations—will benefit from their increasing participation in software and other digital industries.

But even those most enthusiastic about this vision advise caution. Management scholars Crandall and Wallace, for instance, warn that people and technology must be “integrated” in ways that allow all stakeholders (companies, employees, shareholders, and customers) to thrive in the next century. In part, this

means that employees must take more responsibility for “managing” their own careers.

Clearly, the virtual workplace described by e-commerce advocates is driven more by the economizing impulse in business than by any conception of social responsibility illuminated by the needs of workers. Highly skilled computer professionals may benefit from the flexibility a virtual workplace provides, but median workers may find that many work opportunities lie outside of their skills and interests, and they are likely to find intensified competition over a geographically broader labor market.

Those less optimistic about digitally-mediated economies worry that pay scales and common terms of employment will tend to disappear. Increasingly, individuals must negotiate their own rates of compensation and all aspects of terms of employment. Some workers will be powerless to refuse significant reductions in compensation, and labor markets may increasingly resemble auctions in which prospective employees seek to underbid current employees.

The recent controversy surrounding Amazon.com portends such “hyper-marketization” effects of the Internet. Consumers found that the on-line retailer practiced “dynamic pricing”—the adjustment of prices based on information in the customer database—and thus two prospective buyers inquiring about a product would be quoted different prices. (Notably, the Internet itself was used to expose Amazon.com’s practice, resulting in its suspension.) Amazon.com also applies dynamic pricing to labor; for instance, customer service has been transferred to a low-cost sub-contractor in India. WashTech, a union-supported workers’ rights group in the state of Washington, has collected numerous complaints from workers pressed by Amazon.com’s interest in cost reduction, and the group reports that workers may continue to be disadvantaged by “instant” sub-contracting or dynamic pricing of labor.

Those less optimistic about digitally-mediated economies worry that pay scales and common terms of employment will tend to disappear.

Several assumptions of classical economics obscure understanding of labor’s plight under digital capitalism. The traditional economic model presupposes that competition is conducted in an ideal state in which labor demand and supply are equal and unemployment cannot exist. At the equilibrium wage, employers and workers simultaneously maximize profits and individual utility. In the absence of constraints on the

market, each worker receives no more and no less than the value of his or her specific contribution to the enterprise (marginal product), which constitutes just compensation. In this view, new Internet technologies modify the outlines of market processes but do not alter the essential justice of market transactions.

However, as so-called institutionalist (evolutionary) and Marxist economists, among others, have pointed out, market interactions do not always lead to just outcomes. For instance, labor can suffer from “monopsony” effects, monopoly power among buyers of labor. Some employers have the power to determine patterns of compensation in their labor markets, depressing wages below marginal product. Low wages may actually depress employee commitment and motivation even while permitting high profits.

Traditional economics obscures the role of power in economic relationships. The individual’s *right* of exit or refusal to participate in a transaction does not ensure that he has the *power* to resist exploitation. The traditional model relies on a fictitious market-space in which individuals are the locus of decision-making, a space where individual choice is decisive and managers lack power. The imagined market-space obscures particular realms of oppressive labor practices such as domestic and international “sweatshops,” where workers find unhealthy working conditions that they would never “freely” choose.

The economizing effect of the Internet attenuates socially desirable checks on market forces. Employees’ expectations of career and salary progression, which otherwise build employee commitment, are undermined by aspects of virtual workplace and by hyper-marketization.

Unionism and Free Association

Abusive authority in the workplace remains an enduring obstacle to justice and human development. In any economic system, those without authority possess interests distinct from those who own or manage that system. Given the persistence of abusive forms of authority in market relationships, trade unionism derives its rationale from workers’ need to counter such power. If anything, the consistent growth in size and resources of the corporate enterprise increases the need for counter-organization.

The moral case for unionism derives in part from the broadly-accepted right to freedom of association (recognized, among other foundational works, in the U.S. *Bill of Rights* and the *United Nations Declaration of Fundamental Human Rights*). Free association is an aspect of the autonomy of human beings, and union power often preserves a sphere of freedom for employees. Unions negotiate terms of due process, including protection against unfair discipline and dis-



"So, Jim, where do you see yourself in ten minutes?"

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charge. But unions also limit worker autonomy when, for instance, they secure the right to represent all employees in a bargaining unit. Although the individual *loses* the freedom to negotiate his or her terms of employment, the worker *gains* power relative to managers and is less subject to arbitrary control. Employees retain the right to elect union leadership,

The moral case for unionism derives in part from the broadly-accepted right to freedom of association. . . .

form opposition groups, sue the union for failure to provide fair representation, resign from the union (if they continue to pay so-called agency fees in certain states) or vote to decertify the union as their bargaining agent. In no case can workers be said to possess the right to freely associate if they lack legal protections for organizing and employers are legally empowered to suppress unionism.

Unionism also derives its moral force from the pluralist argument that society is comprised of myriad interests. The public interest emerges from a process of articulation, mobilization, and compromise of those interests. Unions, no less than other institutions within society, also express and promote the interests of the group. Further, as Institute for Philosophy and Public Policy research scholar Peter Levine has argued in these pages, civil society is best understood as a realm of intermediate associations which check the potential abuse of power by the state and increase society's capacity to resolve vexing problems without violence. In this context, unionism is clearly an important element of civil society.

Benefits of Unionization

Unionism can be a potent remedy for worker exploitation in free markets. Institutional economists, most notably Richard Freeman and James Medoff, have marshaled convincing evidence that collective bargaining can improve the treatment of employees

and also increase productivity. Collective bargaining not only boosts wages, but it also tends to stimulate efficiencies to fund the wage increase. One result is that both labor and management share an interest in increasing the quality of labor, commonly achieved through better worker training.

Unionism also itself contributes a mechanism for worker voice in politics since, in the absence of unions, employers tend to dominate political debate to the disadvantage of employees. Consider, for instance, the nature of politics in the southern U.S. The so-called solid South refers to one-party dominance in electoral votes in southern states, which now benefits Republican presidential candidates. While many would attribute this phenomenon to voters' conservatism, one can reasonably suggest that the present political reality is due in part to the absence of a labor movement as a factor in promoting more pluralist politics, more serious inter-party competition, and less certain political outcomes.

American unions are relatively weak these days, with private sector union density dipping below ten percent and vast regions of the country nearly union-free. Although it is difficult to determine an optimal level of union density and political power, one could argue that a more powerful labor movement would combat excessive economic inequality and enhance two-party competition nationally. One might also anticipate that employers would invite dialogue with unions on public policy issues of mutual concern. These developments would advance, as Peter Levine has argued, "robust and diverse debate" within civil society.

Internet Unionism

Union weakness, economic globalization, and changing technology require the labor movement to reconsider its structure and strategy. No one optimum model exists for unionism, and continuous adaptation to the environment is essential.

The Internet can contribute to the debate about the proper form employee representation should take. As early as 1972, Charles Levinson of the International Chemical Workers Federation suggested that unions use computerized data banks through telex networks to distribute company information. Today, unions typically rely on Web sites to more fully involve members and better mobilize allies in labor struggles.

As political theorist Harry Boyte, among others, has noted, the Internet provides "free spaces," a realm of voluntary associations that "sustain an important measure of independence from large-scale systems and institutions of government" while they at the same time allow the "practice of power among different interests." Not just unionized workers, but workers of anti-union employers also need the kind of free space

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David Wasserman and Robert Wachbroit, Editors

This volume brings together a group of essays by leading philosophers of science, ethicists, and legal scholars, commissioned for an important and controversial conference on genetics and crime. The essays address basic conceptual, methodological, and ethical issues raised by genetic research on criminal behavior but largely ignored in the public debate. They explore the complexities in tracing any genetic influence on criminal, violent, or antisocial behavior, the varieties of interpretation to which evidence of such influences is subject, and the relevance of such influences to the moral and legal appraisal of criminal conduct. The volume provides a critical overview of the assumptions, methods, and findings of recent behavioral genetics.

Contributors: Robert Wachbroit, Elliott Sober, Kenneth F. Schaffner, Kenneth A. Taylor, Ian Hacking, Allen Gibbard, Marcia Baron, Peter Van Inwagen, Patricia S. Greenspan, Michael Slote, Jorge L.A. Garcia, and David Wasserman.

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Liberal Pluralism

The Implications of Value Pluralism for Political Theory and Practice

William A. Galston

Isaiah Berlin first advanced the moral theory of value pluralism in the 1950s and it subsequently was developed by a number of distinguished scholars, including Galston. In *Liberal Pluralism*, Galston defends a version of value pluralism for political theory and practice. Against the contentions of John Gray and others, Galston argues that value pluralism undergirds a kind of liberal politics that gives great weight to the ability of individuals and groups to live their lives in accordance with their deepest beliefs about what gives meaning and purpose to life. This account of liberal pluralism is shown to have important implications for political deliberation and decision-making, for the design of public institutions, and for the division of legitimate authority among government, religious institutions, civil society, parents and families, and individuals.

Liberal pluralism leads to a vision of a good society in which political institutions are active in a limited sphere and in which, within broad limits, families and civil associations may organize and conduct themselves in ways that are not congruent with the principles that govern the public sphere.

William A. Galston is a distinguished political philosopher whose work is informed by the experience of having served from 1993-1995 as President Clinton's Deputy Assistant for Domestic Policy. He is Saul I. Stern Professor of Civic Engagement at the School of Public Affairs, University of Maryland; Director at the Institute for Philosophy and Public Policy; and Director of the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE). He is the author of numerous articles and several books, including *Liberal Purposes* (Cambridge, 1991), which won the Spitz Prize. He is also a Senior Advisor to the Democratic Leadership Council and the Progressive Policy Institute.

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provided by the Internet, since labor law circumscribes the opportunities to organize at the workplace. While factories, malls, and public spaces all have rules that limit the timing and character of protest, the Internet provides an alternative and less rule-bound space for protest, airing grievances, with no limit to geography.

Further, union leaders themselves have no more control over Internet activism than do employers. Though union leaders can control the content of an official Web site, and moderate its discussion groups, dissident union activists are free to establish their own Internet presence, and need not rely either on official union hierarchies or on employer hierarchies.

Sociologist Arthur Shostak has provided several examples of labor's uses of the Internet. The Hotel, Restaurant, and Bartenders Union used a Web site to construct "virtual picket lines" alerting the public to the details of their disputes with employers and inviting support. Unions commonly rely on Web sites to collect complaints about working conditions, deficiencies in product design or fabrication, large-scale electronic mailing to rally its members.

Unions are also using the Internet in increasingly innovative ways. For instance, *workingfamilies.com*, inaugurated by the AFL-CIO in 1999, offers members low-cost Internet access, inexpensive computers, news, e-mail, chat room services, and shopping services for union-made products.

Labor Notes, and the Association for Union Democracy have extended their reach beyond members of any one union; these two free-standing organizations foster relationships among reform groups

Some predict that a new kind of unionism, e-unions, will eventually predominate.

representing a number of unions. The Labourstart Web site provides a portal for unionists around the world, with links to country-specific labor news and to resources for labor organizing.

Although it remains to be seen whether workers' access to computers and the Internet will effectively promote the interests of workers, Labourstart's founder, Eric Lee, is optimistic: "The Internet is as near to a classless society as you can get. Information is pooled, ideas exchanged, individuals become part of a global family."

Further, the Internet can also disseminate information of interest to union advocates, even information that has been suppressed or ignored by cable services, magazines, and newspapers, which tend to neglect developments important to labor.

Some predict that a new kind of unionism, e-unions, will eventually predominate. Labor experts Wayne Diamond and Richard Freeman describe "e-unionism" in its fully-developed form as providing individual representation, counseling, customized services, and collective bargaining to a broad constituency of supporters. Diamond and Freeman also predict that the Internet will one day extend labor's reach in helping establish services to employees through "minority unions" where formal representation rights have not been won.

To the degree that the Internet provides a new international plane for organizing, pressuring employers, and effecting change, Internet unionism will prove its promise.

One might characterize many of the above Internet benefits as information effects. But more perfect information does not by itself correct injustice in the workplace. The Internet will prove useful to labor in

exposing and illuminating disputes, and in keeping with the sociologizing mode. To the degree that the Internet provides a new international plane for organizing, pressuring employers, and effecting change, Internet unionism will prove its promise.

Effective labor activism using the Internet requires constructive engagement with employers and government. Legal scholar Cass Sunstein has warned that the Internet may exacerbate social polarization as identity-group Web sites tend to reinforce the biases of its participants. Internet unionism, on the other hand, cannot succeed without dialog and compromise. Internet unionists must take care to combine protest with responsibility.

Distributivism

Two nineteenth-century labor organizations, the National Labor Union and Knights of Labor, protested the rise of powerful corporations, insisting that corporations distorted legitimate conceptions of enterprise and obstructed broader opportunity. Drawing inspiration from Thomas Paine and other democrats who stressed that widely-distributed property was a neces-

Several Useful Labor Web Sites

www.labourstart.org

Eric Lee's international labor portal.

www.workingfamilies.com

An AFL-CIO initiative to build union consciousness in workplace, in buying, and in politics. The site includes links to the Web sites of many U.S. unions.

www.workingtoday.org

Working Today is a national nonprofit membership (and union-like) organization for "independent" workers: freelancers, independent contractors, temporary workers, part-timers, contingent workers, and people working from home. The Web site plays a critical role in informing members and allied workers of their rights. One new project is the development of a portable benefits plan.

www.washtech.org

Web site of the Washington Alliance of Technology Workers. It is an initiative of temporary workers and other workers at Microsoft and of pro-union employees at Amazon.com.

www.labornotes.org

Web site of a militant "rank-and-file" group across several unions. Historically members have opposed concessionary bargaining and "union-management cooperation."

www.uniondemocracy.com

Web site of Union Democracy in Action, a group pursuing legal action and pressure tactics to enhance union democracy.

sary component of social justice, these early unionists advocated a vision of small-scale internally democratic workshops as an alternative to the emerging corporate monoliths. Some have called this philosophy “distributivism,” and the Internet has renewed its relevance.

In a variety of ways, computers enhance the potential for craft-based production. They replace fixed, dedicated tools with open-ended, configurable, systems. Individuals and groups can efficiently produce their products—material as well as intellectual—in small quantities, and they can respond rapidly to emerging needs. Labor theorists Michael Piore and Charles Sabel find that some communities of skilled craft workers are already taking advantage of “flexible specialization”:

It is seen in the networks of technologically sophisticated, highly flexible manufacturing firms in central and northwestern Italy. Flexible specialization is a strategy of permanent innovation: accommodation to ceaseless change, rather than an effort to control it. This strategy is based on flexible “multi-use” equipment: skilled workers; and the creation, through politics, of an industrial community that restricts the forms of competition to those favoring innovation. For these reasons, the spread of flexible specialization amounts to a revival of craft forms of production. . . .

Piore and Sabel provocatively argue for the possible revival of the dream of “artisanal democracy”, of an economy based on craft communities as part of a more democratic, egalitarian society. Computer networks permit one-of-a-kind customization, and the production of smaller-yet cost-efficient—quantities that offer an alternative to traditional mass production. Piore and Sabel also predict that smaller organizations are sometimes better suited than corporate monoliths to succeed in an increasingly volatile global economy.

Consider the examples of mod music and the Linux operating system. Invented in the 1980s by Amiga computer users, the mod file format requires the collaboration of many computer users, who send to one another a set of instructions commanding the computer to direct digitized samples of music instruments to multiple speakers and mix them according to a score, resulting in ever-evolving and collaborative musical works.

Merging the subcultures of programmers and composers, mod files are typically available free of charge, as is modplayer software, transforming any low-powered computer into a musical workshop. The individual computer user may assemble sounds collected from around the world in order to compose music (which then is available to others on the Web). Contributors receive recognition from their peers, participate in the mod-based “gift” economy, and they may also earn money for their music or software in other contexts.

Linux, the well-known open-source operating system, was developed—and continues to be devel-

oped—by many programmers and work groups who collaborate and share their work over the Internet. Anyone is free to sell a version of Linux or instructions for its use, but no one has proprietary rights over the operating system.

Computer music and open-source software demonstrate that skilled craftsmen can practice their skills on the Internet and reshape enterprise. Stacy Mitchell of the Institute for Local Self-Reliance suggests that the Internet can aid small local enterprises (such as neighborhood bookstores) in industries increasingly dominated by giant corporations. For instance, the American Booksellers Association represents 3,500 local bookstores and operates a Web site, combining the virtues of neighborhood enterprise and national alliances.

Conclusions about Internet Unionism

These examples show that any sustainable model of craft-based enterprise on the Internet would consist of brick-and-mortar workshops linked to one another and broader employee networks by the Internet. Trade unions would press for needed employer investments in workplace infrastructure, foreclosing the more exploitive forms of the virtual workplace. Unionists would advocate the establishment of labor standards and union contracts in such workshops, enrolling members on both the shop floor as well as on-line, and electronically notifying government and community organization of violations. Union activists would use the Internet and computer technology to counsel and train workers, research and develop products, and facilitate internal union debate.

Networks of small craft-oriented workshops are innovative in product design, responsive to consumer preferences, and focused on quality. Unions should press state governments help such networks flourish by assisting with infrastructure, training, and Internet access, and by involving unions in economic policy-making. National unions can take advantage of employer interest in a decentralized department structure within the larger enterprise.

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