

3.2.2.3.232 Why making poverty history is not in the interest of humanity

It is hard to predict whether ever, and if yes, when, we will live in societies, in which poverty is history; in which the basic material needs of every person, such as food, shelter, and basic medical care, are met.

Theoretically, such societies are possible. They are, because quite probably, the sources of energy, which mankind can tap, are non-depletable: while we will run out of fossil fuels, there are many other forms which are currently considered “alternative” but have the potential to become mainstream; and quite likely, many new forms of usable energy will be found.

Energy sources

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Energy_development

Thus, because it is unlikely that we will ever run out of energy, there exists the theoretical possibility that in the future, not only will poverty be history, but beyond that, we all live in affluent societies.

The question is whether, or to what degree, we would experience such societies as positive. And if we do not experience them as positive, the question is whether or not there will be people who will destroy affluence, out of boredom, or because they expect to benefit from a situation in which hardship is widespread. Or whether we will be ruled by governments who can tune societies so that problems associated with too much affluence will not occur.

To evaluate the options, it helps to be aware that human character expressions, and even human emotions, are, not exclusively but to a certain extent, offshoots of economic conditions. More specifically, certain character traits and emotions that we rightfully cherish are related to economies of need, rather than economies of affluence.

Among these character traits and emotions are: solidarity, friendship, and even love.

When people are poor, they believe that everything will be better when they are richer. But once they are richer, they realize that they are not happier. How can that be? To most people it doesn't make sense, so once they are richer they try to convince themselves that things are better, even they don't feel better.

However, that affluence doesn't make people happier (just as overeating doesn't make them healthier), is well established in scientific research.

Desire to Be Rich and Famous Called a Sure Path to Discontent

<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2011/04/secret-fears-of-the-super-rich/308419/>

Even in China, people actually became not happier by becoming richer:

Money does not buy happiness: poll

http://english.people.com.cn/200501/13/eng20050113_170468.html

In pre-unification East Germany, many people experienced a high degree of solidarity. No, it was not a feeling of solidarity with the government, which the Communist government would so much have appreciated. It was the solidarity of those who were poorer than the other Germans, those in West Germany. They could not afford BMWs, only Trabis, and the East German jeans just didn't fit. But they had a higher affinity for solidarity, and solidarity felt good.

This is from a CNN article about nostalgic feelings among former East Germany citizens:

Quote

“Under the former regime, people looked out for each other, explains the owner. Living under a dictatorship and standing in long food lines created a feeling of solidarity. “You could depend on each other,” he

says, “now it is money, money, money.”

Unquote

Ex-East Germans nostalgic for communism’s simpler life

<http://edition.cnn.com/WORLD/europe/9911/09/wall.nostalgia/>

After reunification, the basis for the specifically East German solidarity was gone, and with it the feel-good effect. Of course, everybody who wants to can now go to the former West Germany, and buy brand-name jeans. Or rather, the brand name jeans that previously were available only in the former West Germany have now made it to East Germany. But are the people happier?

As indicated above, many positive human emotions do relate to negative social conditions: solidarity among the disadvantaged, sharing among the poor, friendship among those in need, and love among those who face an adverse world.

On the other hand, when negative social conditions are removed, we often see a rise of unpleasant human emotions which typically are absent among those who live in negative social conditions: cynicism, nihilism, destructivism (random expression of destructive behavior). Depending on certain other factors, there also is the likelihood for “golden cage” symptoms, such as depression and neurosis.

I would like to strongly differentiate between two kinds of negative social conditions: the lack of affluence (poverty), and the absence of safety (danger). Some of the effects of economic misery and of danger are equal, but others are contrary to each other. And I will argue that a reduction of affluence may be a valuable tool to engineer desired emotions, while a reduction of safety result in entirely negative patterns of emotions.

In situations of both misery and danger, people are, because they will benefit of it, more likely to develop solidarity and friendship.

However, in situations of danger (because there will be a higher level of general distrust), people will form smaller units. In situations of

poverty, on the other hand, emotions of solidarity and friendship will likely have a much broader base.

Even love relationships reflect social conditions. In general, negative social conditions, misery and danger, are more conducive to love relationships than are affluence and the absence of danger and violence.

However, danger and violence (or the danger of violence) will result in a love relationship attitude that is grossly different from that caused by a certain level of economic misery. Danger and the threat of violence makes people emphasize monogamy, while misery can result in promiscuity.

See the following link for psychological research on the different effects that poverty and danger have on children:

Economic Status, Community Danger and Psychological Problems Among South African Children

<http://chd.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/8/1/115>

But not only are social and economic, conditions responsible for the character traits and emotions we develop; social conditions also are responsible for the arena in which humans compete with each other.

There is a biological basis for competition among humans, and it comes down to competing for sexual partners.

Darwin sensed “male competition and female choice”, but even that view was an offshoot of the social conditions he, Darwin, lived in. More neutrally, I would talk of male competition and female competition.

19th century socialists believed that by abolishing private property and emphasizing the creed “from each in accordance to his abilities, to each in accordance to his needs”, they would abolish competition among people. But rather, moving competition out of the material realm leaves people disoriented.

To compete by trying to provide better material conditions is a psychologically easy setting. Even people of limited intellectual capacities can understand that those who provide better material conditions will be more successful in finding sexual partners. Thus, a certain level of economic need makes people industrious, and brings out character traits that are supportive of improving material conditions: not just industry but also reliability, interest in furthering one's education (because it will result in better economic opportunities), friendliness (because it entices people to become a buyer of goods and services).

When humans compete with each other by trying to be economically more successful than others, the world is simple. However, the positive effects on attitudes will only be present up to a certain level: a level well below affluence. Furthermore, the positive effects will also only remain present for as long as the competition is restricted by definite rules. Most importantly, violence and the threat of violence must not be allowed to provide a competitive edge.

Kreutz Ideology has a more differentiated approach to the reverse application of materialism (change social conditions to effect certain character traits and emotions) than Marxists who believe, naively, that simply abolishing private property will solve all contradictions.

It's anyway not a question of who owns property but who controls it.

Fine-tuning social conditions in order to effect certain valuable character traits and emotions is a highly sophisticated endeavor, and it cannot be handled well by governments who result from Western-style democratic elections.

If the intention to create societies that are optimally suited to enjoy optimal sexual experience, and to end their lives in a comfortable death, we want to foster certain human character traits and emotions.

To maintain or enhance character traits and emotions such as solidarity, friendship, and love, we have the option to either allow a certain level of inherent poverty, or of inherent violence.

But violence, even low-level violence, is detrimental to both, the

likelihood of optimal sexual experience and the likelihood of a comfortable death.

On the other hand, to maintain a certain level of poverty favors human interaction on a broad basis, for the purpose (and the pretext) of solving economic problems.

Furthermore, maintaining a certain level of poverty within societies firmly directs competitive behavior towards economic goals: the desire to purchase certain products, even luxuries. If a certain level of poverty were not maintained, the competitive impulse would likely show in a rather irrational fashion, such as conspicuous consumption.

How people compete through wasteful consumption has been analyzed already by the US economist Thorstein Veblen in his book, published in 1899, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Theory_of_the_Leisure_Class

If people cannot profile themselves well through their pursuit of material successes, they move into unpredictable arenas that are harder to control: drug abuse, adherence to destructive ideologies such as punk, or football hooliganism.

Furthermore, maintaining a certain level of poverty can have a decisive effect of counteracting age discrimination. It can be a desirable eigendynamic in societies that younger people enter sexual relationships with older people because older people could provide economic assistance.

Like much else which is said in this article, this idea is not new. You can find parallels in John Kenneth Galbraith's *"The Affluent Society"*, published in 1958.

Affluence and Its Discontents

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/05/09/AR2006050901214.html>

John Kenneth Galbraith

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ John_Kenneth_Galbraith](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Kenneth_Galbraith)