

ECONOMY AS A VICTIMIZING MECHANISM

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1. The Enigma of Modern Economics

The effects of the present economic system are remarkably ambiguous. When we compare modern society with any preceding society in history it becomes evident that the ability to produce wealth is its distinguishing feature. It also is evident that the most highly productive and technologically advanced societies of the world are at the root of grave social and ecological disturbances that are pushing humankind to the edge of global catastrophe. The scope and complexity of the adverse effects and risks, of the degradation to the natural surroundings and to social cohesion, are unprecedented in history. Although those phenomena are well known, they are not widely understood.

The positive effects of modern economics are evident. The outstanding capacity to produce a vast array of technical instruments and rational organizations which serve as problem solving tools have opened the way to a level of prosperity, and indeed of affluence, that is unparalleled in the history of civilization. In sharp contrast to this story of success is, however, the equally impressive record of destruction. The gulf between those who possess vast material means and those who possess the minimum for survival is widening both on a global scale and within individual affluent societies. The relation between increased productivity and ecological destruction seems to parallel that between growing wealth and growing human misery. The high rate of exploitation of natural resources and the artificial changes in climate are endangering the viability of future generations to the extent that the extinction of species and cultures is, finally, not a vague, futuristic threat, but a clear and present danger to life as we know it.

The economic performance of the prosperous nations today, and of modern society in general, invokes a number of critical issues that need to be

addressed. Why have the developed nations been so successful in achieving their high productivity through the efficient utilization of systems of organization and participation? Why have those particular success-making qualities enabled them to dominate in such a global and universal way, while their competitors retreat into an increasingly marginal economic existence? Why does the paradox exist between the global richness and success of certain societies and the destructive nature of their output? The logical cumulative question is, then, Why is the current economic system both extraordinarily productive and destructive?

Paramount efficiency in the production of wealth and success

Never before has society been so efficient in accumulating wealth. This is the most striking feature of the upper financial strata of humanity, of, for example, the OCED countries. Whatever factor can be singled out, the formula remains the same: high levels of input of energy and other resources, and high output in terms of tools for production and consumer goods. For decades the general trend of income, savings, investments, and consumer expenditures, whatever their fluctuations, has been upward. In spite of the grievances and alleged cases of injustice, ever growing prosperity and affluence has become the normal expected result of the economic process.

Wealth is produced not only in terms of achieved output, but also in terms of the capacity to tackle any difficulties through an expansion of the economic process. This may be the most important feature of present economic performance, even more important than its excellence in increasing the output of goods and services.

Wealth is accumulated, moreover, not only in terms of material goods and services, but in terms of the options we have in reacting to the reality of needs and scarcities. The real products themselves become enhanced options that specify particular means to improve technologies and to apply rational solutions to troublesome situations and, thus, to identify those situations as problems and to solve them.

In the context of modern society, wealth is essentially the twofold process of the means for domination on the part of both states and companies, and of ever growing liberties. The premise is to win access to exemplary, that is to successful and happy, life styles. All the while the focus of attraction may shift from power to the anticipated pleasure of consumption. Any item of the economic process may serve to signal—to both themselves and to others—the positions of the participants, as Jean-Pierre Dupuy and Paul Dumouchel explain in *L'enfer des choses*.

This quality of the economic process sets the stage for the various types of participants in modern society. The twofold premise of power and liberties conveys to them a unique strength of motivation. The fantasy and, eventually, the freedom that one experiences in joining in the creation and never-ending improvement of life styles is a full time game. The redressing of fantasy as an ongoing generational process, rather than any efforts in education, is what in fact has shaped our mentality. The drive to imitate the conspicuously powerful and materially wealthy leads us to willfully adapt to the given economic order. In the same way, the impetus to match or surpass the others' achievements in lifestyle and power provides the raw energy of the modern economic process. Important sectors of the economy make it their business to fuel this process and to transform the energy into acts of buying and, indirectly, into a willingness to sell. The result is conformance to the rule of the market.

The prevailing patterns of motivation thus assure the complicity of an overwhelming majority of the participants in the modern economy. The performance in providing the material and organizational basis for domination and for liberties are, consequently, modernity's true measure of productivity.

Modern wealth is the capacity to succeed

The expected outcome of economic activity, which is the motivation of the participants, is more demanding than any mere "value" in the conventional sense of the word. The real outcome is success: the assurance and promise to be able to succeed not only in some next row of economic competition but in any situation of rivalry. The impetus to improve products and ways of production does not aim, in the first instance, at the improved quality of goods and services. The objective is the improvement of one's position in the struggle.

This approach to economics is in striking contrast to the common belief that the domain of economics is defined by the efficient, "economic," procurement of goods and services: how best to deal with given scarcities; how to develop technologies and allocate resources in an optimal way; how to win and protect market positions; how to minimize costs and maximize positive effects, especially in terms of profit. The prevailing perception is misleading, for economics reaches far beyond these factors.

In present-day societies the central guideline of behavior which reaches into all aspects of collective and private life is to be the most efficient among competitors. Such behavior has become self-evident, a true paradigm of the times. The proof of efficiency in contrast to any other guideline that might refer to valid norms or to a debate of sensibilities is the true mark of success

in competition. As interest focuses on chosen examples of success in chosen fields of competition, which may vary greatly, the crucial characteristic of modern competition remains always its focus on dynamic success.

Modern economics provide us with a self-evident framework in which to perceive realities and potentials, in short, to perceive the course of the world. As consumers or producers, rich or poor, adapt to imagined laws of economics, we reproduce a pattern of perception and measurement which is thought to be exempt from any dispute about values and norms. While other sets of rules, be they linked to tradition or to religion or to the dominance of one group over others, have faded away one by one, the law of the market continues to dominate and to enjoy, moreover, a privileged position in the face of any challenge of pretended injustice or partisanship. This law of the market, the essence of modern economics, does not deal, however, with goods and services, with prices, costs and profit. It is, rather, a "linking" together of people by a set of indisputable rules of behavior. Life in the sense of both existence and the "good life" is geared to economic success and that success is geared, in turn, to acts of buying and selling. Success depends on ones interaction in the chain of buying and selling.

In the framework of a "theory of systems" such behavior may be described as a peculiar type of communication which anonymously links activity to received or expected payments, as Niklas Luhmann suggests (52). But in today's market societies, economic communications are increasingly meaningless. In many markets an economic asset is an asset not because of the intrinsic qualities of the product; its value depends on its function in the acts of selling and buying. While the aim is to defend positions and to gain the advantage over competitors, the only valid criteria are whether or not the capacity to buy and sell can be strengthened in the future. In the most advanced markets, the financial markets, the optimum achievement is the speculative transaction undertaken at the moment that values appear to suddenly multiply without any corresponding "real" achievement.

The global and universal "victory" of market society

In huge leaps the planet is becoming "one world." Deeply split and divided by different levels of wealth and opportunity, humanity increasingly is unified by a single way of organizing collective and private life. Since the collapse of the Soviet empire in 1989, the victory of capitalism is generally viewed as the "victory of market society." Unification does not work, however, in the way previous generations had imagined. It is not founded on a commonly shared system of beliefs and values, and its progress does not depend primarily upon

governing institutions like the United Nations. What ensures global success is the apparent economic success of the rich countries. By virtue of their economic achievements (and the military power that goes with them) such countries have become the model par excellence that draws global and universal fascination.

Nevertheless, the obvious success in producing wealth in the material sense of tangible goods and services does not fully explain the victory of market society: that victory does not depend solely on factors such as a superior efficiency in the development and improvement of products, technologies, and ways of production and marketing. Nor is it founded primarily on the accumulation of capital and demonstration of astonishing levels of consumption or on the supremacy in the provision of military armament. To understand the victory of market society we must understand the peculiar and irresistible dynamics of the rich societies' achievement of success in any field of endeavor.

The proofs of the superiority of the capitalist way of life converge on a double proof: the evidence, first, that success is the only valid value and, second, that the key to success is the economic organization we generally call "market society." The media spreads the word of the global victory of the wealthy societies through an invasion of images that present the fantasy of power and happiness as a veritable, and attainable, reality. The promise lies in our apparent ability to transform grievances and aspirations into defined problems and to organize the means and strategies to solve such problems. The message is, if you know how to sell properly you can buy success. Control over the fantasy, first, of the elite and, then, with the help of the mass media, of ever-increasing segments of the population is the story of victory.

The media's invasive images confirm that the attractiveness of the capitalist system reaches far beyond the realms of production and consumption. Material success demonstrates an achievement in the mobilization of human energies and in the concentration of such energies on a common goal. Not only could none of the formerly competing societies match this achievement of capitalist society, but it could likewise not be duplicated in modern times through the use of coercion or the reanimation of traditional systems of belief.

The only rival to the capitalism in the view of large segments of the population is not only part of the same modernity that led to the capitalist market society but is rooted in the same Judaic and Christian tradition that nourished its victory. Under the heading of "real socialism" a system of bureaucratic coercion was combined with an orientation towards the struggle

to transform ever larger parts of the world into means of domination. The goal was "to match and to outstrip capitalism." With the collapse of the Soviet empire, this pseudo-alternative has been unequivocally discredited.

Because the Soviet system had been widely regarded as the only relevant alternative to capitalist society, its collapse was interpreted to mean the disappearance of any conceivable alternative whatsoever. And rumor began to spread of the "end of history." But the story of the victorious market society is definitely not over. The reasons for this are clear: first, the story of victory is also the story of devastation and disruption and, second, the inherent contradiction of capitalist society has bred its own inherent instability. After the defeat of the only rival, the Soviet Union, the propaganda of the victors claimed that free market societies were by historical necessity both law-abiding and democratic.

The history of successful capitalist societies does demonstrate that the rule of the market on the one hand, and the rule of law and of democratic institutions on the other, are conrescent. Since both rules are rooted in Judaic-Christian history, this claim can be seen as paradigmatic: it can be seen to function in fact as a taboo. Because we believe that we cannot have the benefits of market society, of wealth and assured success, without democracy and the rule of law, or vice versa, we perceive modernity as just one and indivisible; we perceive it as the identity of market and political democracy. But as my study will show, we are in fact heirs to not one monolithic modernity, but to two different and contradictory ones.

Experience in some of the most swiftly advancing zones of market society suggests that capitalism may flourish best in situations where the peculiar "European" mixture of market society with democracy and social balancing is least supported. In such cases, when respect for human rights and social balance is no longer a primary concern, a very different blend of capitalism emerges. Even in zones where the mixture of market society with the rule of law and democratic institutions originated, the pretended identity between them has never existed. The great transformation toward market society is only intermittently a story of political freedom, fair bargaining, and participation. It is the story of the exploitation of the weak by the strong, a story that culminates in imperialism and fascism. Efforts to strengthen civil society and to democratize the state remain fragile at best, for the pressures of market forces are eroding democratic institutions or, increasingly, are instrumentalizing them. The prospect of increasing social and ecological destruction may point to a sharp conflict against the institutions of freedom that comprise the watershed of market society.

A record of destruction

The Western capitalist societies impose their style of economics everywhere and on every level of collective and private life. Their almost unchallenged domination to date is surprising when we consider the uncensored quality of the output, the record of devastation and destruction that persists alongside the record of wealth and prosperity, the severe social and ecological damage.

When radical ecological criticism of the economic system and its all-invading sway of pretended rationality got under way in the sixties and seventies, Dupuy was calling for disclosure of the "treason" of affluence (*La trahison de l'opulence*). Only recently, however, has the manifold degradation of the natural surroundings become a daily concern for large segments of the population. The obvious strain on natural resources, concern for damage to the ozone layer, and artificial changes in global climate have finally become important pieces in the perception puzzle of capitalist economics. But daily exchanges of information bring to the public attention far too infrequently further equally alarming damage—that, for example, during the lifetime of present generations, more resources are being exhausted than in all the thousands of years of prior human civilization or that the extermination of species is diminishing the biological heritage, irrevocably. We already are noting that ecological degradation is causing expenditures of a magnitude that is being felt by many as a severe loss of income and shrinking of prosperity.

Social degradation as the corollary to the successful production of wealth is no less alarming although it has been long kept in the shadows of public attention. While productivity constantly increases and results in the growth of national product and of the income and prosperity of some segments of the population, the socially negative effects of that productivity are soaring. In a global perspective, never before have so many had to live in misery. A striking contrast exists even within the rich nations between the levels of achieved productivity and wealth and the widening zones of misery and social disruption.

Clearly, the normal functioning of the labor market leads to social disruption. Market society is labor market society to the extent that the advancing globalization of the economy opens, at least in part, global labor markets. As a consequence, large segments of the population throughout the world, including the rich countries, are forced to compete with less protected and cheaper labor forces from elsewhere. The prospect is a permanent reduction of acceptable jobs for growing numbers of people which is a problem not only with regard to income but to integration within society as

well. As market society finds its orientation in expanded success that is proven in the marketplace, the jobless are ever more unsuccessful and become, by that token, outcasts.

Social disruptions and ecological destructions are globally interconnected. Our perception of the damage and the risks is, however, curiously hampered by the obvious need to not risk the success of the prevailing economic system itself. The prospect is creeping apocalypse.

The systematic underrating of destruction—a reason for success

There is little public awareness of the increasing devastation that accompanies the rise of market society in contrast to the wide consideration given to its benefits. The common perception of economics is that it deals with value and the increase of value, not with the opposite. The negatives are seen as the price to be paid in exchange for the accrual of value, a price that is paid only when it is unavoidable; they are to be reckoned with as costs, and as such, in accordance with normal economic behavior, must be reduced. We do not generally treat the negative effects in the same way as the positive results of the economic process. The point is to balance assets with costs, to minimize costs and maximize assets in terms of increased profits.

In the perception of many, however, the degradation of solidarity within a society and among continents, the strain on resources, and the growing output of waste and pollution are not an acceptable price for the kind of affluence gained. It is doubtful, moreover, that those adverse effects have even been properly taken into account as costs. And this leads to the more profound doubt as to the reasonableness of the prevailing pattern of values and of the measurement of negative effects. To run the risk of a global destruction of the natural basis of society and its economic system does not seem to be a reasonable plan of action.

Murderous and suicidal expansion

Market society has been constantly expanding, at least since the Great Depression seventy years ago, and that expansion, or "growth," continues to be a paramount objective of business and the state. Intermittent periods of slower expansion or stagnation or even recession are seen as a threat, and the fight against that threat corroborates the conviction that expansion is a precondition for the effectiveness of our economic system. The peculiar dynamic of the rich societies is a dynamic of expansion. Whatever shortcomings or grievances arise, the situation is ever defined in terms of strategical problems that can be solved by growth. Rising unemployment in the richest

economies is countered by expansion, which is meant to result in an increase in jobs. The problem of pollution is countered by expansion, which is expected to generate antipollution investments.

Such reasoning is both simple and powerful. It has become the consensus of opinion that if we create a surplus by initiating and stabilizing expansion, then additional private or public investments will solve the social, economic, and ecological problems. Expansion also provides a benevolent way to spend the newly gained surplus, be it through further expansion, through social compensation, or through ecological restoration. The recipe is paradigmatic: in order to cure the negative effects of any given expansion, expansion must begin anew.

But it is those very negatives in fact which provide the power for expansion. In order to combat the ever-growing ills of society we need an ever-growing economy: we achieve economic progress by transforming the negatives into stimuli for further expansion. Among the favorite stimuli are the response to exhausted or polluted water reserves that entails huge expenditures in pipe lines and costly recycling installation, and the identification of an external threat, an enemy, which triggers the build-up of military arms and defense systems on both sides. Reaganomics is an outstanding example of economic expansion that is fueled by the pretension to fight negative economic problems and results in the growth of further problems: while verbally advocating a massive retreat of state intervention, Reaganomics justified enormous investments in arms and defense systems in name of its fight against the "empire of evil" and incurred equally enormous public debts. Large portions of the gross national product are defensive and curative in the same way that a car crash demands additional expenditure to replace the damage and treat the injured.

There seems to be no alternative to expansion in the dominant market society. The debate, which centers on method rather than substance, is periodically renewed: would expansion be achieved through state intervention by means of deficit spending, public investment in different infrastructures, or the subsidization of labor costs, or—what is currently considered the more attractive alternative—should the more powerful segments of the market force be favored in order to accomplish this goal?

Economic expansion, euphemistically termed "growth," is, thus, not only a matter of fact. It is a prescription in itself which is universally taken for granted: that economic expansion is essential is an undisputed guideline of economic behavior. It is the keystone of today's economic paradigm.

The capitalist market society, doomed to struggle for endless expansion, did not invent or develop checks and balances against its own inherent destructiveness. Its record of devastation and disruption is striking. Technopathical expansionism has invaded societies, cultures, and ever more sensitive parts of the biosphere, and it has resulted in the overexploitation of resources, the extinction of many species, the disruption of social solidarity, the growing misery for a majority of humankind, and the perspective of global civil war. The real outcome of this type of expansion may well be suicide.

The political output of modern economics: an incapacity to act

The puzzling feature of the highly productive and destructive modern market society is why it remains destructive in spite of the ever-growing capacity to solve problems through economic expansion. There is a sufficient information about the negative social effect, especially the ecological ones, but the majority does not react to those threats. Politically, there is a stifling incapacity to act or even to reflect on the facts. The prevalent behavior is a reluctance to confront reality, as if to do so were a crime against rationality.

Rationality today means the rationality of the market society. The political achievements of former generations—the rule of law, the aspiration toward human rights, democratic institutions, and certain liberties that give space to a civil society—continue to endure. But the experience is that political institutions are, at best, useful in repairing some of the damage of economic expansion. Essentially, they function as instruments in the service of the more powerful forces of the market society.

A sense of inevitability reigns. People function as they can in a system of competition that allows them to be partners in an enterprise to transform any item in the world into profit and promises success in that endeavor. Inside the system, the partners find no genuine limits to that game. The peak of success is to make value out of nothing, as we see clearly in the financial markets. Within such a system of values it is useless to plead for any moral other than that of competition. Continued expansion, and all the destruction it brings with it, is a precondition for the effectiveness of today's market. To dare to confront the enigma of why vast productivity is geared to an equally vast destruction is to break with the all encompassing consensus.

A sense of responsibility cannot flourish in this context. Any experience of the negatives generated by market society inevitably leads to despair and bewilderment. The political consequence is a widespread incapacity to act. Out of contempt for politicians and institutions, out of apathy and anxiety, the only

substitute for action seems to be the outbreaks of hatred against chosen enemies.

The deficiency of modern economic rationality

Essentially, the rules of competition for success are as simple as they are brutal and self-explanatory. Only occasionally do economic or political players draw on the social and economic sciences. One such occasion is the call for the scientific analysis of a problem as it is perceived at the level of an enterprise or a state bureaucracy. In this case the chosen scientists perform the function of an instrumental service. Another kind of demand is for a well-worded framework for a chosen policy. Here the recourse to imaginary economic laws may serve as an apology for the negative results of economic expansion, especially at times when the public is articulating its anxiety and discontent.

Quite a few scientists, however, feel the urge to make use of their work in a more reflective and non-apologetic way. One such example is the trans-disciplinary group *Alternative Ökonomie* of the *Interuniversitäres Institut für Forschung and Fortbildung*, which is active in the Universities of Innsbruck, Klagenfurt, and Vienna. The objective of this group of scholars from different branches of scientific inquiry is to inquire into the rationale of the modern economic system so as to clarify the reasons for the double edged, successful and destructive, nature of modern economics.¹ Their investigation attempts to transcend the prevailing fragmentation of the sciences and to reconsider the economic system, its beliefs and methods, in the broader context of a *modell neuzeit*, "model of modernity" (see Heintel 35).

The cultural innovation of modern civilization is its unique blending of technology with the sciences and economics which we call economic rationality, its novel kind of world perception and of the organization of collective and private life in a seemingly nonpartisan "objective" and "scientific" way. A paradigmatic impetus seems to urge modern people to free humanity from its dependencies upon nature by organizing our control over nature and over human behavior. We have developed the capacity to fabricate and manipulate the world (Hannah Arendt's *homo faber* and the related *animal laborans*) at the expense of other human faculties, especially the capacity to act.

¹ Member of the *Alternative Ökonomie* group are Arno Bammé, Wilhelm Berger, Roland Fischer, Peter Fleissner, Caroline Gerschlager, Luise Gubitzer, Peter Heintel, Ina P. Horn, and Ada Pellert. In the following paragraphs I draw extensively on the research of this group, especially on the work of Bammé and Berger, and the publication *Kurswechsel*.

The expansion and refinement of material and organizational instruments at the expense of common sense, and indeed of the senses, has resulted in what can be termed 'technopathical expansion'. We counter internal contradictions and failures with more of the same, either through a new cycle of instrumental and organizational expansion or through the marginalization of the resisting and bothersome factors. Consequently, modern civilization is caught in a dynamic and ever increasing oscillation between states of chaos and self-complication.

Conventional economic sciences, in all their diversity, tend to use esoteric language as a means of self-immunization and defense against any practical criticism. More often than not their models, which seem to excel in formal qualities, are narrow in their scope of explanation and ever more distant in their contact with economic reality. A variety of strategies are developed to avoid responsibility. Confronted with the gap between the behavior of political and economic actors on the one hand, and the course taken by the sciences on the other, one hears explanations like, "they do not follow our prescriptions." Overspecialization automatizes irresponsibility.

Science is also invoked to improve the performance of chosen economic actors, of managers or holders of portfolios or officials of state bureaucracy, and to defend or impose, whether correctly or not, certain types of behavior within the economic sphere. In a more aggressive way, some scientists make it their business to propagate the invasion of reckless competition through virtually all spheres of collective and private life under the auspices of "rational choice." As we know, one can win the Nobel prize by applying this type of economic reasoning to criminal or otherwise harmful behavior, in other words, by merely balancing advantages against disadvantages.

Many scientists have expressed strong dissatisfaction with mainstream economics and the essentially "magic" modern economic rationality (see Binswanger 1985, Kitzmüller 1991). The collection of conversations in Arno Bammé's *Der kalte Blick der Ökonomie* demonstrates the urgency of the problem: Stefan Schleicher argues that "there is [in conventional economics] an enormous deficit with regard to economic development" (801); André Gorz warns that "the predominance of economic, i.e. quantifying, rationality is pushing us towards an abyss" (410); Claudia von Werlhof contends that "to call this type of economics 'rational' is irrational" (1053). The consensus is that a lot of theoretical rubbish must be cleared away before constructive work can begin. According to von Werlhof, "we need to investigate the violent foundation on which the edifice of economics has been built" (1022). Rudolf Bahro further admonishes that "a logic of self-extermination" is in operation

that necessitates the investigation "into the reasons for modern destructiveness well down to its roots, where the dynamics of capital is not the principal factor" (153).

These scientists refuse the various strategies of escape and diversion, of apology or retreat into specialized problem shooting. They take sides with socially and ecologically motivated opposition movements, who in their turn become aware of the grave deficiencies of modern economic rationality. Their particular questioning of the relevance of economic rationality may lead to the formulation of a hypothesis which clarifies the actions and events that lead to the emergence of modern "technopathical expansionism." And such knowledge in turn may suggest appropriate adjustments in culture and politics that would permit a "reimbedding and redimensioning" of economics and facilitate its less destructive performance. The challenge is: What type of economic order should replace market society? (see Kitzmüller 1992).

2. Economics as a Violent Mode to Deal with Violence

The contribution of mimetic theory

The cultural context of today's market society extends beyond the limits of conventional economics. For this reason, if we are to clarify the enigma of modern society's high productivity coupled with destructiveness we must shift our attention away from the surface of economic phenomena to the more fundamental texture of human life. For such approach, René Girard's theory of mimesis and Dupuy's modern society applications appear to be most fruitful.

In their introduction to *L'enfer des choses* of 1979, Dupuy and Dumouchel acknowledge that "economics is the essential form of the modern world" (10). They clearly formulate their objective, which is "to understand the progressive invasion into all aspects of public and private life of the logic of economics and merchandise" and proceed to develop, on the basis of Girard's mimetic model, a theory of modernity that discloses the dominance of economic rationality. As Dupuy and his collaborators illustrate, whatever the merits of mimetic theory as a means to understand former societies, the concept certainly serves to illuminate the ambiguity of the cultural dynamics of modern society and the devastating success of capitalism. Whatever argument may be raised as to the validity and reach of Girard's descriptions of premodern and non-modern societies, his peculiar type of thinking applies particularly well to modern postreligious and desacralizing society.

Above all, the theory of mimesis posits a change of perspective with regard to the anthropological and epistemological premises of modernity. It breaks with the paradigmatic basis of modernity as exemplified and propagated by Newtonian physics and by the Cartesian split between subject and object which reduces the fabric of the world to relations of domination, acquisition, or neglect. The artifice of methodological individualism, which is the unquestioned basis of most mainstream economics, vanishes. The modern individual as a product and "real abstract" of organization is brought back into his or her real context: the "I" is an incorporation of certain relations with others, and the quality or type of those relations will determine the particular space in which the development of the "I" is realized.

The contrast here to conventional thinking can hardly be overestimated. Human existence is no longer reduced to the quality of a pretended ontological entity, like that of the modern individual struggling against nature to satisfy its trumped up "natural" needs. Instead, men and women are conceived in their interrelation with others, and the multiple drama of such interrelations is considered in the broader context of our relation to the nonhuman surroundings.

This is a more realistic view of human life. After all, it is only too obvious that desire and passion play an important part in human existence. And desire and passion inevitably point to some other person; they do not transpire out of an isolated bundle of needs. Mimesis—desiring and living passionately in relation to others—is elementary, far more so than cognition and strategic acting.

Mimesis is also, however, extremely ambiguous. Mimetic interaction allows the chance to grow emotionally at the same time that it opens the risk for emotional corruption. The realism of mimetic theory emerges clearly in its depiction of the drama of mimesis: of the rivalries that result from mimetic fascination and the contagion of violent passions that lead to hatred and panic, to cycles of revenge and destruction for individuals as well as for groups and nations. Girard and his followers have elucidated innumerable examples of this interpersonal drama in works of literature, in mythologies, and in holy books. The particular concern of this study is that mimetic creatures are by necessity members of a group or a society and that society, in turn, is a response not only to the drama of mimesis but also to the surrounding world.

The mimetic actors and their society depend upon favorable or unfavorable preconditions in space and time, and on the resources, technologies, and forms of organization available. It is my view that we cannot retrench in a monomaniacal reduction of societies to the dimension of their dialectic with

nature alone. The states of chaos or stable order that may occur should not be identified with the drama of resources, technologies, and organizational history alone. On the contrary, any society's capability to use resources and develop technologies and suitable forms of organization will depend on the specific response to the drama of mimesis. The type of response to mimetic violence both nourishes and limits the capacity of any society to be productive.

The great transformation towards modernity must not be reduced to changes in fields unrelated to the prevailing response to mimesis and mimetic violence. Conventionally, we view the genesis of modern civilization as a consequence of the surprising and unique innovations in the sciences, technology, and economics. But these innovations must be seen as conrescent with a cultural dynamic that operates within the sciences, technology, and economics and assigns to those systems a new and unprecedented value.

Modern economics' channelling of desire and violence

As we shift our attention to the dynamics of mimetic energy and mimetic violence in modern society, we discover two distinguishing characteristics. First, emotional energies are mobilized and concentrated on types of behavior that were not assigned the highest priority in other societies. We invest heavily, for example, in fantasy, discipline, and restrained force to assure one's adaptation to the functioning of market society. Many of the barriers and inhibitions that other societies imposed upon the games of mimetic desire have either diminished or been removed. As a result, the envy, avarice, and rivalry that many cultures treated as carefully monitored and severely sanctioned vices have become the obvious driving force of prosperity and peace.

Second, the massive mobilization and concentration of energies within modern society and the economic sphere have not been accompanied by a corresponding rise in the level of outbursts of violence. Although it would be hard to defend the view that modern society is truly peaceful, the deadly cycles of revenge and violent clashes that haunted so many groups and cultures have, at least periodically, receded. Many observers interpret the contemporary outbursts of violence such as the Great Wars, Naziism, and, on a different scale, the rising criminality in some regions as a relapse into premodern or antimodern behavior which is not due primarily to the functioning of market society.

The outstanding innovation of modern society is its channeling of violence, its mobilization of mimetic energy and the diversion of such energy into a seemingly innocent rational activity: that of economic expansion. In this innovation both the mobilization and concentration of human energy, and the

emergence of a typical unawareness of the effects of mobilized energy are of equal importance.

On one hand, the fascination of imitation has become increasingly free of traditional inhibitions, which conveys to men and women the manifold experience of unencumbered freedom. On the other hand, the mimetic games and their components of envy, avarice, and rivalry are set loose within the confines of a particular economic system where they are geared to acts of buying and selling. The energy that stems from such vices becomes one of the driving forces of reckless competition. At the same time, generalized envy geared to profit provides the energy for a virtually endless expansion. This explains the outstanding success of modern economics to produce wealth which has resulted in the proclaimed victory of market society.

In modern society envy, rivalry, and avarice are put to the service of prosperity and peace, but the puzzling question remains, Why does this not result in ongoing violent clashes and cycles of revenge? One would expect the highly contagious violent passions to lead to the decomposition of order into panic, but the modern solution is unique, for it is both successful and suicidal. It is a paradigmatic reinterpretation of situations of mimetic violence as occasions to advance at the expense of third parties. We learn and exercise a generalized attitude of indifference toward competitors as well as collaborators, an attitude which permits operations involving great numbers of people in an anonymous way, be they collaborators, competitors, or victims.

Modern economics deals with non-economic factors by channeling violence. Its essential achievement is not improved performance in exchanges, production, allocation of resources, or fair distribution; it is in having devised the best way to contain violence while making use of mimetic desire to power unlimited expansion. In this sense modern economics is, as Dupuy puts it, a violent mode to regulate violence: it contains violence in the sense of both accumulating it and restraining it

Market society: a postreligious mutant of victimization

Advancing at the expense of third parties is the modern way to make use of violence while protecting the process against violent disruption. In this sense, victimization is the core of modern economics: losers and victims are key components of this modern "violent way to regulate violence." If we consider that sacrificial mechanisms are central to the regulation of nonmodern religious societies, is it viable to assume that modern market society victimizes in the way of societies dominated by religious hierarchies? In other words, is modernity simply another religion?

Normal behavior in today's society, even when it is ritualized, does not bear an obvious resemblance to primitive ritual. Modern sacrifice, as a rule, does not look like sacrifice: it does not cleanse and unite the participants as in sacrificial ritual. Nevertheless, the perennial sacrificial channeling of violence has been performed in all periods of modern time too. As always, those who maneuver the sacrificial mechanism channel the energies stemming from mimesis to achieve a unified polarization against an enemy, a scapegoat, a victim. Today, resurgent mobs, aggressive nationalism, hatred against strangers, and antisemitism flourish again.

The particular treatment of violence in modern times is distinct in two contradictory ways. One response to violence is political: the hedging and de-escalation of violence is achieved through political constitution and participation, and the rule of law and systems of social protection. The participants in this response are defined by their capacity to act politically rather than as market partners, as producers or consumers, or as victims or victimizers. The political response to date has proven to be weak, however, when it has not been corrupted into a service for sacrificial nationalism or for the forces of market society.

The strongest and to date most effective current response to violence is modern economics. Market society organizes a generalized victimization which is no longer confined to types of victims such as witches or criminals. Anyone can be a victim; anyone can be ascribed responsibility for economic failures. The individual not only is free to master his or her fate but must accept full responsibility in the event of failure. The modern regulation of violence is in fact a mutant of sacrificial culture which expands and diffuses the dynamics of victimization.

The normal relation inside this diffused and all invasive machinery of victimization is indifference towards others and towards any other aspect of nature. The globalization of the economy and high levels of the division of labor facilitate the lack of awareness of the consequences of one's actions. Both technically and organizationally, the distance between victimizer and victim has grown to such an extent that anonymous victimization makes it easy to impose and defend all kinds of domination.

We might go so far as to say that the global and universal preponderance of modern market society is due to resolutely imposed indifference and neglect. By virtue of this indifference, competition assumes the complex quality of being both murderous and innocent. The newly achieved global victory is the result of an unsurpassable management of exclusion that invades all sectors

of life. Useless or bothersome factors are marginalized; they are included by virtue of their exclusion.

How to win at the game of social suicide: the story of technopathical expansionism

The globally victorious market society produces victims in unprecedented proportion and it does so systematically. International business manages its commerce, its mobility in finance markets, and its technological capacity in such a way as to regulate competition for its own exclusive interest. The labor market often entails competition with people living at the edge of existence; its global expansion is always at someone else's expense.

Even within the rich societies the number of victims/losers increases while ever larger segments of the population are unemployed and live under the threat of social disintegration. Their fate provides the background of an ever more urgent struggle for success, a struggle which involves even the apparently successful winners, whose every instance of success reinforces their urge to renew the struggle. As competition focuses on goals of positional goods that are limited by their nature or by the rules of the game, there is never 'enough'.

Ostensibly, the purpose of modern economics is to respond to any given scarcity through the provision of goods and services: economic rationality pretends to be the tool for the reduction of scarcities. But the real economic process tells another story. The successful response to a scarcity through additional production, better organization, and improved technology triggers more numerous and complex scarcities. The result is that the main intermediate product of the economic process is scarcity in ever growing increments (Dumouchel 137-210). Any success in the reduction of scarcity is transformed into an urge to cope with more complex scarcities. The result is a self-enforcing expansion.

Increasingly, competition seeks senseless results. Success becomes an end in itself, as is evident in the media's parade of "stars" and in the notion of quantitative excellence expressed in monetary terms. The rise of casino type capitalism as a matter of fact and of fantasy is illuminating: by virtue of mimetic fixation on the winners, the losers remain in complicity with a system that produces losers in ever greater numbers.

Despite the apocalyptic prospect described at times by the media, the accelerated invasion of nature by the exploitation of nonrenewable resources, the devastation of land, and the extinction of species are taken for granted as a means of compensation for the negative social effects of expansion. Dirty growth has become the means to insure income and social stability. Little by

little, the degradation of the quality of life and the rising burden of defensive expenditure affects everyone. The covictimizers are turning out to be their own victims.

Manufactured unawareness: a keystone of victimizing economy

Progress at the expense of third parties may go on as long as the victimizers do not perceive their part in victimization. They may continue to make use of losers in order to persist in their struggle for the type of success they are imitating. The social negatives of economics produced as the counterpart of wealth will continue to provide the motive for further expansion. The efforts to fight growing unemployment through further expansion—the present rationalization of "jobs through growth"—is as illuminating as the effort to finance ecological restoration through a renewed effort in destructive expansion—the rationalization of "growth for the sake of nature."

In spite of the growing awareness of social disintegration and ecological degradation we are not moving in the direction of real organizational change. *In spite of abundant information that points to the suicidal character of modern economics, most members of market society do not integrate such information into their world view in such a way as to react accordingly. How can we explain this startling phenomenon of inaction?*

The efficiency of the modern regulation of violence is most conspicuous in its fabrication of systematic blindness. Although that regulation achieves similar results to those of more primitive sacrificial systems, it does so through a different mechanism: violence is contained within market society through the loosening of mimetic energies and the expansion of instrumental power. Because this leads to the illusion of prosperity and peace, members can deceive themselves about the victimizing character of their complicity. This modern, more diffused and generalized, mutation of victimization shields the system against both criticism and efforts of enlightenment. But it also demands an enormous effort on the part of members of market society to become and to remain indifferent to virtually everyone and everything. It is that very indifference which allows the apparently innocent expansion to proceed.

The obvious success of market society to mobilize the energies of desire and to channel them into technopathical expansionism should not blind us to its fragility. The drama of mimetic energy oscillating between chaos and order is not a peaceful one in spite of the containment of violence. As Dupuy rightly emphasizes in citing the work of John M. Keynes, the speculator of the finance markets, who is normally considered the most advanced example of economic

rationality, depends on imitation: *homo economicus* cedes to *homo mimeticus* (Dupuy 1991, 83-97; 1992, 106).

Given the strategic importance of finance markets, the prospect of panic decomposition is alarming. Out of the chaos some type of order may emerge that is an amputation of the achievements of modernity, of the rule of law, democratic participation, and institutionalized efforts towards social balance. Although such achievements are conrescent with market society, they also point to the need for greater awareness of the effects of reckless competition. The answer to market society may lie in the reorientation of our attention towards the often neglected element of modernity, the element included by virtue of its exclusion.

Can we enlighten modernity?

Modernity is not only the story of decline, of social disruption, of ecological devastation and, ultimately, of suicide. It is a story of the freeing of humanity from the inhibitions of any kind of sacrificial order and from the domination that thrives on such order. The challenge is to establish the correct relation between these two dimensions of modernity.

Though both aspects of modernity emerge from an effort of desacralization they are not only different, but contradictory. As I have illustrated, market society is a mutant of sacrificial order which mobilizes mimetic energy into technopathical expansion and contains violence inside the market. An enlightened modernity aspires to a different kind of unity, one based on constitution, that is, on a structuring of time and space that can enable human beings to deescalate violence. Although enlightened modernity is by and large conrescent with market society, it has also led to the rule of law, to timid forms of political participation, and to organizational efforts to achieve social balance. At present, however, the pressures of market forces on the one hand, and of antipolitical nationalism and violent mobs on the other, are eroding democratic institutions. Market society and rationality continue to dominate, but their performance spells devastation and ruin.

Given this situation, the decision at hand is not whether we should opt against modernity by adopting the fundamentalist model or embrace market society as the only alternative to the antimodern reaction. This false alternative must be replaced by the real option, which is to continue to develop the modern mutant of sacrificial order, market society, and expansionism as we know it, or to lead the pursuit towards an enlightened modernity and more equitable, less destructive, political and social achievements.

The latter option would necessitate an effort to transcend the individual. The task is, above all, to enlighten our organizations in the direction of the reduction of negligence and the elimination of indifference. We must invent organizational systems that make their members aware of any instance of threatened exclusion. The peacemaking that is achieved through the union of majorities against selected victims, migrants, and strangers must end.

The founding of a political constitution adapted to the present situation would include some program of reembedding economics in political culture, of redimensioning and rebuilding economics in strict accordance with ecological and social priorities. This would entail a gradually advancing but drastic tax reform, for example, that would unburden human activities and reduce labor costs at the same time that it would heavily burden energy input and the exploitation of resources, especially those that are nonrenewable. Equally important would be the sharing of both advantages and disadvantages, including the sharing of access to jobs. The introduction of models of basic income accompanied by broad efforts to open up social space for manifold activity might strengthen civil society without subduing it to market society.

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