

Politics, spirituality, the economy.

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Sebastian Parsons

Unlike physics or chemistry, which study the physical world, economics is a science of the spirit. Our economy is what we make it – it isn't separate from ourselves, it is us, it is what we do, it is the decisions we make, it is the actions we take. At least on one very important layer, economics is a matter of psychology, of human need and desire, of human group relations, of the human spirit at work.

The recent financial turbulence has seen economists around the world scratching their heads as the economic theories of the last decades fall in tatters around their feet. Their commitment to their economic theories had been absolute and had, in a real way, ruled the world, and yet the economy has simply not performed to their expectations and everywhere economists are struggling to find a new paradigm, a new set of rules, a new belief system. As ever, when crisis blows away our expectation, minds are opened and there is a chance for thoughts, long waiting on the margins, to be seen at last.

We are in a period of mass unknowing and the desire for inspiration is palpable. However, what is happening in the largest scale is something we are all used to. In knowing we feel alive in our will and in our actions, bathed in the lightness of bus-i-ness. However, of our spirit connectedness we are oblivious – the spirit is in the dark. When unknowing brings our will to a halt the situation reverses: physical darkness, but if we are brave enough to stay in the unknowing, in time spirit dawning and spirit lightness appear.

With practice trust in this dawning grows and the unpleasantness of not knowing becomes a peaceful waiting for inspiration. I find myself called to this waiting by two lines from the Foundation Stone Meditation

(<http://sebastianparsons.blogspot.com/2009/11/foundation-stone-meditation.html>): “Thou livest in the resting head” and “Practice spirit vision in restfulness of thought”.

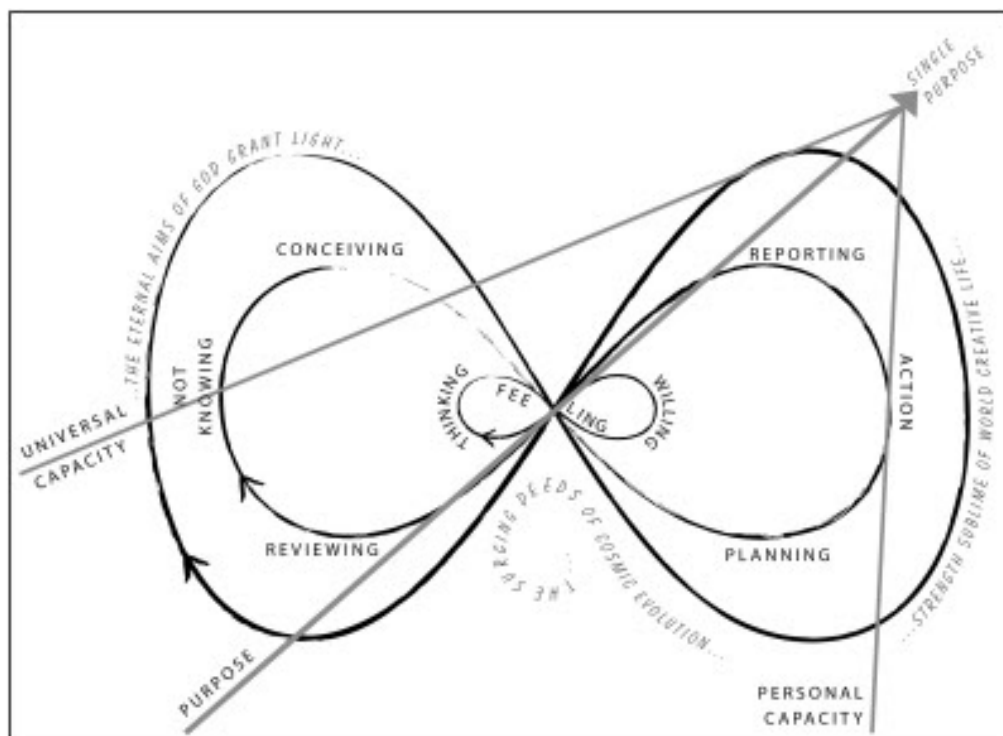
This working out of the spirit, described by Otto Scharmer in Theory U[1] as “leading from the future as it emerges” is possible in the smallest and biggest moments of our lives, as individuals, members of communities, and as nations. But what is the geography of this moment? In practical life, what lies either side of this unknowing?

I experience a rhythmical movement between review and planning which in time may move decisively forward in to the carrying out of a plan. This movement, might take me once, or perhaps several times, in to unknowing. Sometimes I may act out of the unknowing itself – conscious that I don't know, but that I have to act. Praying as I go – clear of my intention, but also clear that without a controlling plan I may need help from friends unseen. However, if I have time then I wait to act until I have a plan that I feel trust in, and a moment that I feel is right.

I experience ideas carrying me out of Not Knowing, and feeling carrying me through to action – the manifestation of my willing. At all times my thinking, feeling and willing are working, but in my consciousness, one or the other of them will be at the fore. In thinking my attention is carried inwardly away from myself, in willing it is carried outwardly away from myself, and in feeling I return to myself[2].

In my Actions my capacity is that of physical being. In its first verse the Foundation Stone Meditation speaks of “the strength sublime of world creative life” – my own I growing to full being as God creates our world and my I working toward full being as I shape the world that is around me.

In my Not Knowing I have access to the capacity of the Spirit: “which, from the eternal wellspring, opens for thee, the thoughts of the World”. Finally, in my Deciding I balance the “ideas of the World” with my “strength sublime” and shift from inaction (in-ner-action!) towards action (physical action), from thinking to willing, and feel “the surging deeds of cosmic evolution” flow through me as the actions I will – in however small a way - reshape the world. I make a decision by testing my plan against my purpose – do I feel that my proposed actions will serve the purpose?[3] The Foundation Stone Meditation: “What with our heart we would found / And with our head we direct / With single purpose”. In other words, all the thinking, feeling and willing activity of my life is directed to a Single Purpose. But what purpose?



The Foundation Stone Meditation holds this image of world creation, and our world is the natural world and the world we create – part of which is the economy. I experience Steiner’s Threefold Social Order as a road map for understanding how we are sharing the task of World Creation. It describes how we strive after personal development in the Cultural realm and strive to meet each others needs in the Economic , and how through the Rights Realm these potentially paradoxical aims are united in to one single purpose.

My Cultural life is the journey of my “I”, in freedom, towards full being. My Economic life is the work I do that is directed by your needs, to help “YOU” on your journey towards full being. My Rights Realm life is the way “WE” agree how we will be together as we travel towards full being. I, YOU, WE, in every moment, always.

Our evolution towards freedom, articulated in so many ways by Rudolf Steiner, depends on our capacity to work together. Without community of effort the task of survival becomes all consuming. Community of effort and the division of labour combine our actions to meet each

others needs and in so doing create spare time, create value, give us the chance to think about something else apart from when and how we will eat again.

Businesses, hospitals, schools, children's homes, families, in all our organisations we work together so that we get everything we need done quicker and with less effort. Without the development of the economy how could we have found time to create the wave of emancipation that has carried freedom from Kings and Lords, through to men and now all of us? Without freedom for all there is no Rights Realm, and without the Economy there is only the I. Imagine life without washing machines (and if you think this would be just fine, are you a man?) What amazes me about this picture is that it describes what is happening already. The difference between one successful but truly mercenary company, and one successful but truly ethical company is not the forces that are working through the company but the way the people at work understand their organisation.

In other words, it doesn't matter what an entrepreneur thinks is driving his business, he is successful to the extent that he meets people's needs by mobilising the personal capacities of his team through the agreements that he has made with them. To the extent that he motivates with fear and greed, perhaps by controlling with rigid detail, the people in the organisation will struggle to unite themselves in freedom with their tasks. To the extent that he motivates out of love, perhaps by sharing the purpose of meeting need and by inspiring team members to work out of their own initiative, the people in the organisation will have the chance to act out of their own freedom.

It is perfectly feasible, as we well know, for an organisation to be physically successful pulling against the spiritual the stream and motivating with fear. The approach a leader takes does not necessarily determine whether the organisation will succeed or not. The difference is in effort, physical and spiritual, that has to be continually exerted. It may prove, for an individual, unsustainable, and lead to personal burn-out.

I have a yearning for the Three Foldedness of society to be recognised, but not for it to be created. It has come about, and is there to be seen by anyone that cares to look. Seeing the Three Foldedness of society offers the usual competitive advantage that a more exact understanding always offers. By taking account of the Three Foldedness of society an organisation can become more efficient, can create more spare time and more value, with less effort, and help us move further on our journey through "cosmic evolution".

In an organisation people combine their effort to the purpose of meeting another's need. Whatever the product: healthcare, education, food, clothing or narcotics[4], the underlying gesture is towards another. It is a reaching out, and critically, the organisation is only successful if it achieve this, if it does meet the need. That's the freedom of the Cultural Realm – rule number One.

Underlying this gesture of giving is a very strong force, the force of love. The sort of love we might call brotherly, as befits the Realm of fraternity, of working in community. The main driving force of our economy is love. Whether or not an individual is aware of this does not change the underlying dynamic force at work.

So a company that is striving to be ethical, that is striving to be conscious of the three folded nature of society will begin to be conscious of the role of love in what they are doing. They will begin to be aware that working together as part of a team they are held in a basket woven of love for the purpose of their combined activity, which is sending out in to the world something, imbued with love, that will, in meeting needs, be sharing their brotherly love with their wider

community. Consciousness or unconsciousness of the force of brotherly love determines, not the success of the organisation, but the sense of fulfilment of the organisation.

By working together to meet each others needs we create freedom and spare time. In working together we are directed, we are not free, but by working together we become more efficient. This efficiency generates time and wealth with which we win the chance to exercise choice. It is deeply purposeful, and, willy-nilly it is the “Thoughts of the World” that have, through us, organised our society in the way it is.

The opportunity offered by the Credit Crunch, this colossal moment of collective “Not Knowing” is the chance to notice the reality of our society and rejoice in it, rather than stay slavishly focussed on our communal fantasy of the selfish economy. Whatever your job, you can chose to do it to meet the needs of whoever will benefit from your work. Rather than trying to find motivation for working from the money you will receive it is actually in everyone’s power to unite themselves in freedom with whatever task they are doing.

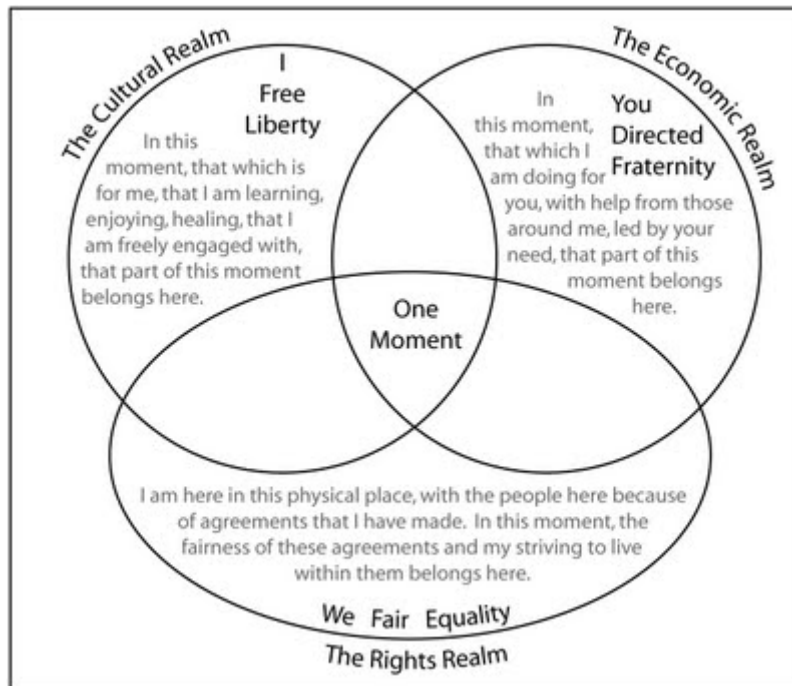
For a Chief Executive to make this transformation will have an effect that will, perhaps, be more quickly obvious. The truth is, though, that the whatever your job – cleaner, teacher, doctor, engineer, drain clearer – you will transform yourself, and in time those around you, when you transform the inner gesture you hold towards your work in to a gesture of loving giving to whoever’s need you will be meeting.

When a workplace is full of bullying, fear, darkness and so on, this workplace is in denial of the love that is flowing through it, the love that is generating the success it is achieving. The transformation of consciousness does not change the love, it simply changes the denial. Working ethically is more efficient because it means that all our capacity becomes available to devote to the task in hand, that of meeting another’s needs. Our load is lightened as all the negative, heavy feelings fall away. Suddenly we are rowing with the stream.

Critically though, an ethical organisation is not a lovely organisation. It is not an organisation that puts its co-workers first. An ethical organisation is one which puts all Human Beings first[5] – co-workers and those who receive the organisation’s output. When everyone is put equally at the centre of the loving endeavour then something potentially deeply sustaining, purposeful and effective is born.

In an ethical organisation a co-worker that does not manage their own feeling life successfully and lays it off on their colleagues in emotional manipulation is breaking the Rights realm agreement of the organisation. They are putting themselves before everything else. Ethical organisations sack people. Ethical organisations experience fear and doubt. Ethical organisations die if they stop meeting need. But in an ethical organisation the real fear of existence is faced, named and worked through.

In the developed countries we have currently lost our sense of knowing. We had expectations which failed us. Our long held paradigms have been proved false. However, the economy has not stopped, it still exists. Need still exists, and need is still being met. This is a moment when a new thought can come to the fore. Not a new way of doing things, but a new way of seeing why we are as successful as we actually are. It takes energy to live in denial of the love that is the driving force of our communal life. With this energy freed we open up capacity to carry out ever more healing and positive transformation.



[1] C. Otto Scharmer, Theory U – Leading from the Future as it Emerges, The Social Technology of Presecing. Published by Sol, 2007..

[2] It is true that in thinking I can make myself the subject of my thinking, and so my thinking takes me inwardly in to myself – as in this discussion, for instance, and that then I experience an inner separation between my self that is considering me and my self that is being considered. Which is complicated, but also quite useful as Steiner reveals in The Philosophy of Freedom: “This then is indisputable, that in thinking we have got hold of one corner of the whole world process which requires our presence if anything is to happen. And this is just the point on which everything turns. The very reason why things confront me in such a puzzling way is just that I play no part in their production. They are simply given to me, whereas in the case of thinking I know how it is done.”. p32, Philosophy of Freedom, Rudolf Steiner, 1984. This English edition 1964, trans. Michael Wilson.

[3] See also Philosophy of Freedom (ibid p200) “He determines the value of life by measuring achievements against aims.” Although this quote is not about decision making, but evaluating action taken, when making decisions I play through the possible outcomes which will come from acting out the decision. It is the same test, located both in the planning and the reviewing of an action.

[4] Whatever the need, it is the need that is powering the process. If the need is for heroine, for instance, then the need is there and people will strive to meet it. The fundamental problem is the existence of the need. Perhaps the need will have been created out of deeply unfree and corrupt practices – there are degrees of freedom in marketing too.

[5] If you truly put the Human Being first then you have to care for the planet. Without an ecologically sustainable economy we are curtailing the future of the Human Being we are striving to put first.