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Interview with Daniel M. Haybron
Donald Davidson
Difference and Migration
Manifesto: The Good Society

Inequality
Hilary Putnam
Liberation Theology
Goldgaber on Derrida

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After the fall of the Berlin Wall, socialism seemed to have been relegated to the periphery in the philosophical, political, and social debates. In fact, only Cuba and Venezuela nowadays openly proclaim to be socialist states. There is of course China which in spite of retaining its authoritarian state inherent from its communist past has been embracing the values of the free market in its economy. Even in China, immersed in international efforts for a dominant influence on the global spectrum, the diffusion of socialist values is not on top of its agenda.

Ironically, the issue of socialism became topical during the political debates in the last electoral presidential campaign between Donald Trump and Joe Biden. During this campaign, Donald Trump repeatedly portrayed himself as a shield against the dissemination of socialist values which he alleged were being proclaimed by the Democratic Party. A similar approach was adopted by the supporters of Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro in his last election campaign in 2018.

It is easy to dismiss such political arguments as mere electoral rhetoric that is detached from objective realities. The fact remains that socialism has become a subject of political confrontation whereas it previously formed part of the philosophical political debates on how to improve our societies. Furthermore, the greater the political support the extreme right groups manage to gain, the more radical the extreme left will become.

The Hegelian dialectic explains how a thesis naturally creates its own anti-thesis that generates a synthesis. And such a process keeps going on leading to new developments. Hegel was strongly criticised for seeing this process as inevitable and unavoidable. However cogent this critique may appear to be, Hegel's thesis helps us to comprehend better the social processes of the globalised economy heavily sustained by transnationalism and digitalisation.

It is unfortunate that the deeply polarised political divisions contribute to the prejudicial judgement that tends to create or sustain stereotypes. One can just look towards the measures being adopted to combat the covid-19 pandemic and realise how much they are misguidedly driven by political bias. What should be a simple question of public health ends up becoming a political issue that leads to divergences rather than convergences. Policymakers need to search for the right balance and avoid extreme political stands that benefit one segment of society to the detriment of another. The aim should be to create a new synthesis that is the result of a logical and healthy dialogue between the actors and stakeholders of society. Such a dialogue would hopefully leave little room for manoeuvre among those embracing an extreme political stance.

Socialism is back!
SHARE Magazine asks a philosophical question to thinkers from diverse academic backgrounds:

'Is inequality an inevitable feature of any human society?
If so, what can be done to reduce it?
If not, what can be done to overcome it?'

source: https://wid.world/world/
Godfrey Baldacchino

Even in death, we are not the same: a visit to a cemetery will display lavish tombstones and sculptures for some notable folk; while those undocumented migrants who die drowned while attempting perilous crossings at sea remain nameless and forgotten.

Inequality is inevitable and a mark of all societies - including those purporting to be ‘egalitarian’.

Serious difficulties arise when it comes to deciding whether to enhance, stabilise or reduce whatever inequalities exist. Such decisions are the foundations of the rift between left-wing and right-wing ideologies: the former privileging equality over freedom; the latter championing freedom above equality. The wave of neo-liberalism that has accompanied and facilitated globalisation since the 1980s has made it more palatable and acceptable to allow ‘market forces’ to determine outcomes - which means that inequalities have increased within this historical period, and leading to reactionary movements by those who were feeling worse off and forgotten, and embodied in the likes of Trumpism, Brexit and anti-establishment sentiment.

Covid-19 has exacerbated inequality: last March 2020 singer Madonna, sitting naked in her bathtub, claimed that Covid-19 does not care about how rich you are, where you live, etc. - it’s “the great equaliser” she said. However, those with unequal access to various resources - including health care, clean water, disposable income - have suffered more with and because of Covid-19: they have experienced higher levels of morbidity and mortality, both within countries and between countries. You can only wash your hands regularly if you have water to spare.

The challenges posed by climate change are glaring consequences of sprawling inequalities, and suggest bitter ironies: the citizens and industries of China and the US belch carbon into the atmosphere, while the citizens of Tuvalu and the Marshall Islands - who have no significant polluting industries to speak of - will be the first to have their land disappear with rising seas levels. Clean air, clean water and ecosystem health are ‘public goods’ unfortunately subject to, and victims of, the glaringly unequal rapacious pursuits of the few at the expense of the many.

Inequality can be reduced via suitable policy measures - such as redistributive taxation; but such measures are deemed to scare employers, investors and entrepreneurs. Most societies also offer, even if rhetorically, opportunities for social advancement. That would typically allow some members of the under-class to lift themselves out of poverty; most societies also offer mechanisms for joining the expanding ranks of the middle classes. These exemplars of mobility help to weaken or deflate pent-up resentments and frustration at the inequalities that remain.

Professor Godfrey Baldacchino is a Maltese and Canadian social scientist. He is Pro Rector and Professor of Sociology at the University of Malta. Between 2016 and 2020, he was the UNESCO Co-Chair in Island Studies and Sustainability at the University of Prince Edward Island, Canada.
We all commence our life’s journey from diverse levels, as regards resources available to us, power echelons and the degree of nurture that we may enjoy. In every society that has ever existed, some form of inequality prevailed. Forms of inequality may differ depending on the particular society. However, there is no society which has eradicated inequality totally.

Keith Payne (2017), a psychology Professor at the University of North Carolina has studied inequality in depth. In his book The Broken Ladder, Payne presents findings which indicate that inequality affects us not only materialistically, but also in the way we think, the decisions we take and also effects the state of our health. This in turn creates a vicious cycle of inequalities.

A surprising finding from Payne’s research was that inequality is a perception, and social comparison was a determinant of the felt consequences of inequality. Even participants who were materially affluent but perceived themselves on the lower spectrum of their social class, felt the negative consequences of inequality.

Personally, my experience of living and working in Egypt for a time turned my concept of inequality on its head. I used to attribute inequality to powerful groups versus less powerful ones in society, due to material things, race, gender, and status. However, in the building where we lived, the bawwab (the person taking care of the building) lived in one room in the building, with his growing family of five children. By European standards, the family would be considered on the low side of the inequality formula. One thing which struck me was the genuine smile that always greeted us from his family. They exuded a sense of serenity and calmness, which I had never encountered in any European country.

Inequality assumes that one side is on the higher side than another in the formula of life. But in such a case, who was on the higher side? Those who have all material resources or those who have peace and calmness in their lives.

Can inequality be reduced? As we have seen throughout history, forms of inequality have changed or been drastically reduced. For example, in the last hundred years, the gap between the genders has decreased, although not fully closed yet. This happened through brave people who stood up to be counted and brought awareness to the unfairness of this inequality.

To reduce inequalities, we need to create environments, where every person would have access to basic material resources, such as food and a decent place to live. We also need to create environments where good quality education is accessible to all. History has demonstrated that it is possible to escape from social inequalities. There are various stories of individuals who despite their adverse circumstances of birth have managed to become successful through hard work and determination. Building resilient, educated citizens will help us create a more equal society.

References:


Gertrude Spiteri is an HR practitioner with a background in social work and psychology. She is at present researching decision-making under stress for her doctoral studies.
Philosophers, and here I mean political philosophers, have been sceptical with regards to total equality. Even Marx was vague about it. Aristotle, to take a classic example, believed there was a natural inequality, and while this could be a problem if the economic disparities were too great, it did not concern him greatly.

More recently, by which I mean in the past century, some writers of the liberal tradition believed that a modicum of inequality was beneficial and could encourage people to make an effort. A famous exponent of this view was Friedrich Hayek. Interestingly, the same view was expressed by the feminist writer Mary Wollstonecraft in her writings about the Scandinavian countries way back in the 1790s.

Staying within the broadly liberal tradition, John Rawls, in A Theory of Justice (1971) wrote that inequalities could only be tolerated if they “benefited the least well off”. In other words, it is better to live in a relatively prosperous but unequal society, like say Canada or Sweden, than to live in an equal but impoverished country, like Ukraine (a country which is statistically very equal).

Perhaps, a bit of inequality is acceptable. It might even be inevitable. Yet, the fact remains that most of the richest, environmentally sustainable, and healthiest societies also tend to be very equal. And, we also know that the most equal societies are democracies.

So, if we want to have more equality, we need more democracy. But, sadly, that is not how the world is going at the moment, I fear....

Matt Qvortrup is Professor of Political Science at Coventry University. His book 'Death by Thousand Cuts: The Slow Demise of Democracy' will be published by DeGruyter in the summer of 2021.

Human beings have to be empowered to reach self-fulfilment. Although they are born ‘equal’ in rights, they are not equal in terms of natural and economic attributes. If they are to attain their maximum potential throughout their lives, they have to be guided and assisted to identify their selves, chart their own strengths and weaknesses, and strive to build upon and enhance their natural endowments.

Even in some of today’s communities that claim to be class-less, every person has to strive hard to counteract whatever social stereotypes may be present, whether ethnic, gender or work-related. And some may not succeed in this endeavour. As a result, inequalities arise in the distribution of personal-support services which are given by families, proximate groups and even by national welfare systems. In turn, such conditions contribute to the persistence of inequalities in resource allocation, wealth and income creation and distribution, personal well-being, and social solidarity and mobility within a nation-state and globally.

Attempts to contain such inequalities have to be multifaceted. They must address personal convictions regarding the human dignity of every individual; interpersonal solidarity; clearly defined policy objectives which inspire overall policy orientation in the context of international relations, the economy, trade and finance; and subsidiarity in policy decision implementation.

Three observations are worth recording. First, populations evolve constantly. These ensuing demographic features tend to induce a shift in the ranking of personal priorities. Economic factors impact strongly on subjective well-being in low-income countries. But free choice maximisation and self-expression become increasingly predominant as people become wealthier. However, analyses which focus primarily on personal acquisition through purchase and receipt (in consumer societies) omit the contribution that ‘sharing’ makes to personal well-being.

Secondly, a similar point may be made to models assessing company behaviour. In the ‘shareholder model’, the company is a private property owned by those who hold its stocks. The company exists to make profits for its shareholders. In contrast, the ‘stakeholder model of the firm’ considers the company as a servant of a larger society. There is a wide range of groups and individuals who are impacted by the activities of the firm, and, so, may have a stake in the company. By shifting analysis from one vision to another, a better appreciation of a company’s interconnections with its service providers is revealed and possibly followed up.

Thirdly, decisions regarding rules of behaviour are made by parliaments and implemented by governments. They are meant to maximise the ‘common good’. But this ‘good’ seeks generally the interests of people living within a defined ‘nation’. International (Mankind’s) considerations are not their prime aim. Besides, decision making in parliamentary democracies are often influenced by the political cycle, which bears on the behaviour of the political players. Hence the pronounced objective of pursuing the common good need not always materialise and the interests of particular groups may prevail in the course of law drafting, legislating and implementation.

The containment of inequalities will have to proceed from the personal level to strengthen the conviction in the basic dignity of every human being and then proceed to create the tools to assess the behaviour of the respective agents in the private and public domains at the national and global level.

E.P. Delia’s career spans academia, public sector institutions and private organisations. A former chairman of APS Bank and Mid-Med Bank, he published studies on the economic and social transformation of the Maltese Islands. These include ‘Ethical investment in a dynamic society (2012) and ‘Evaluating Malta’s political economy (2017).
The question of whether human societies are intrinsically unequal is difficult to answer for the reason that ‘equality’ can take on many different meanings and definitions. We can think of equality as a legal principle where every individual is, or isn’t, equal before the law; we can think of in/equality in relation to different social identities, like women or men, black or white, and their differential access to power, status and resources; we can also think of in/equality in terms of social classes, wealth and income. Often, these different understandings of equality overlap and any one meaning or definition is inextricably linked to the others.

However, besides seeing equality from the lens of inequality in practice, we should also understand the concept of equality as a matter of value. The principle of equality as value rests on the notion that all persons are of equal worth. Recognising the equality of value of all human beings is fundamental to our living together. If we weren’t all of equal value, any one person or group could claim intrinsic superiority over others, and there would be no basis over which such claim can be accepted or refuted. Living becomes a perpetual struggle to prove or resist superiority over others.

Thus, the acceptance that all persons are of equal value is not a matter of absolute moral truth, but a prerequisite for a functioning society that enables the full satisfaction of human needs.

Inequality seen from the perspective of both practice - the unequal distribution of power, status and resources - as well as concept – feelings or ideologies of inherent superiority over others - is a feature of human history and different societies, as is the struggle for equality. No society has ever been totally equal in all its dimensions, and no group or individual has ever managed to definitively establish superiority over others. Thus, neither equality nor inequality are natural features of human society. It is the social, political and, above all, the economic system that determine the level of in/equality in practice.

I believe that the principle that all human beings are of equal value should guide us to fight for and build social, political and economic systems that lead to equality in practice: egalitarian structures based on the active participation of everyone in decision-making and on an evenly distributed control over resources and production.

Andre’ Callus is an activist involved in campaigns for economic, social and environmental justice.
Inequality has become a central theme in politics, generating grievances that fuel widespread protests and violence. Two contradictory imperatives are at play. On one hand, neo-liberal economics, globalisation and the cult of celebrity generate extraordinary wealth, but share it unequally. That very inequality gives business interests political leverage, so that legal frameworks are skewed even more in favour of the wealthy and the powerful, at the expense of the poor and the marginalised. On the other hand, minority groups lay claim to civil, political, social, cultural and economic rights. Gay people, the disabled, women, racial, ethnic, linguistic and religious minorities are among those that use the discourse of rights to secure equality for their communities; some have indeed secured notable victories. In short, the cause of ‘equality’ has experienced both major reverses and advances over the past century or so.

This exposition hints at the difficulty in defining ‘equality’ and ‘inequality’. This is one reason why political discourse about them is fraught with ambiguity and emotion. Philosophers grapple with the meaning and purpose of ‘equality’ and ‘inequality’, while social scientists and policymakers craft mechanisms that supposedly promote the former and reduce the latter.

Jewish and Christian scriptures disclose comparable processes at work in the ‘sacred histories’ of both faiths, although the words ‘equality’ and ‘inequality’ almost never appear. For example, the account of the creation in Genesis does not describe men and women as ‘equal’. Superficially, it appears to give primacy to men, by presenting Adam as the first created human being and saying that the woman was fashioned from his rib.

However, the creation account emphasizes instead the soaring dignity of human beings made in the image and likeness of God; the complementarity of ‘male’ and ‘female’ and the intimacy that ought to characterise all human relationships.

Similarly, the Torah’s legal codes place all social relations - domestic, labour, political, military, economic, etc - in the framework of a divinely initiated covenant. The covenantal vision of social relations is deeper, more enduring and more subtle than the idea of a social contract which has dominated political philosophy since the Enlightenment. It does not abolish wealth, gloss over or exploit religious, ethnic, economic and social distinctions; rather, it embraces them and privileges those who are poor, powerless and disadvantaged. While acknowledging that ‘the poor are always with you’ (Mt 26:11), Jesus also proclaimed a blessed fate for all those afflicted by inequality or injustice (Mt 5: 1-12). The social doctrine of the Catholic Church and the welfare programmes run by all faiths are the contemporary face of these religious traditions.

To sum up, inequality is undoubtedly a feature of every human society; it is the consequence of humanity’s wonderful diversity as well as of humanity’s institutions. To acknowledge this, is not to affirm that inequality is inevitable or that it cannot be addressed. The Judaeo-Christian faith tradition cherishes diversity as a fount of well-being; it seeks justice for all; and it serves with especial charity (love) to the poorest and least powerful.

Edward Warrington is Associate Professor of Public Policy, at the University of Malta. He lectures on policy analysis, constitutional politics, rule of law, non-governmental organisations and comparative government. His research focuses on governance of small states, Maltese constitutional development and Maltese public policy.
History shows us that inequality has featured prominently in societies around the world. One way of conceptualizing inequality today from a sociological perspective could be by analysing its possible various dimensions. These could include economic, social, and political dimensions among others. Economic inequalities could relate to factors such as class, income, occupation, wealth, and distribution. Social inequalities could relate to factors such as status, identity, exclusion, access, and networks. Political inequalities could relate to factors such as participation, representation, and decision-making. As one may immediately notice, these factors intersect with each other: They may influence each other in each of the different dimensions.

One may also ask pertinent questions which may present quandaries. For example, would a society which is relatively equal but has a comparatively low quality of life (with the exception of elites) be preferred over a society which is relatively unequal but has a higher quality of life, even among the bottom strata?

Another question we need to ask is whether inequality is the result of structural factors emerging from social background, policy, institutions, and social arrangements or whether it has to do with agency, such as for example one’s life choices, determination, and efforts.

I would suggest that we look at the intersection of such factors, keeping in mind the possible diverse situations and cultural values in each context. Besides, different policy set-ups may encourage or discourage such factors, sometimes even unintentionally.

If we agree that we are to overcome inequality, there are various ways how this can be conceptualized. For example, we may focus on one or more of the following: Equity, which refers to fairness; equality of opportunity, which refers to arrangements that enable participation; equality of outcome, which focuses on results after people participate; equality of worth, which focuses on our basic rights as human beings or citizens; and we may even recognize equality of diversity, which recognizes people’s different abilities, aspirations, and situations. We also must look at the relationship between rights and responsibilities.

Michael Briguglio holds a doctorate in sociology and is Senior Lecturer within the Department of Sociology at the University of Malta.
The short answer is yes. Inequality is inevitable because as part of nature we cannot escape it. It is said that we bring nothing with us when we first see the light. Nothing could be further from the truth. Secondly, it is not only the patterns we are born with, but what world we are born into.

Nature determines several factors from the outset: gender, the right number of limbs placed in the right place, a disposition towards different abilities, mental acumen... upon which an insensitive society bestowed its ultimate decoration, the medal of normality. Aristotle said that the worst form of inequality is to try to make unequal things equal. It might sound unfair, but in fact, it is what the education system aimed at doing by introducing learning assistants and the rest. Sports would be the best example. There you find categories of gender, weight, according to the discipline. Putting everyone on the same starting line on a level track is not justice.

And the idea of level track points to another factor. We have not landed on a virgin planet each with an equal bag of equal tools. No. Some step into a world of privilege and power, some into penury and poverty, some into love, some into discord. The permutations are endless. For here on Earth, we start the race with what we have.

And that's where true Sapiens should come in. We cannot treat unequal things equally. Justice has three facets: merit, equality and needs. Merit should be rewarded, equal opportunities should be a goal, needs must be met. The aim of society should be to reduce inequality by raising the less towards the more. This has to be solidly grounded in education. That is humanity’s salvation. To intervene and break the vicious circle of ignorance, we have to start by showing that ignorance is neither desirable nor ‘cool’. Nor is it a part of our culture.

It is not a question of degrees. We do not want to plaster walls with certificates. The first step towards reducing inequality is to make the underprivileged believe they deserve to be out of the cesspit. It is the duty of the rest of society to provide the ropes and ladders.

Adrian Scerri is a visiting lecturer with the Department of International Relations. He obtained a Master's Graduate in Theology and is currently pursuing a doctorate that is linked to the studies of diplomacy of the Order of the Knights of Saint John.
An Interview with
Philosopher Daniel M. Haybron

Daniel M. Haybron is Professor of Philosophy at Saint Louis University, United States of America. He received his PhD at Rutgers University. His research focuses mainly on the psychology of well-being and its connections with issues in ethical and political thought. He has published numerous articles in these areas and has two publications on the subject of happiness — ‘Happiness — A Very Short Introduction’ (Oxford University Press series, 2013) and ‘The Pursuit of Happiness: The Elusive Psychology of Well Being’ (Oxford University Press, 2008). In this interview carried out with American philosopher Daniel M. Haybron exclusively for readers of SHARE magazine, Ian Rizzo explores the philosophy of happiness.
In your biographical note, it is mentioned that an aspect of your research focuses on the philosophy of psychology. Philosophy and psychology are two different disciplines. What is the affinity, if there is any, between the two?

The sciences are more or less continuous with philosophy, so it can be hard to tell the difference between science and philosophy. Especially when you’re looking at the really theoretical aspects of a science, for instance debates among biologists about how to define a species, which is partly a conceptual question.

When it comes to psychology, there are massive philosophical issues to sort out. You can’t pick up a brain and pull out little “mind” parts that you can isolate and study, like an experience of love. So it’s hard even to conceptualize what you’re trying to study. But how do we know if what they’re measuring is really happiness as we know it? Are they measuring the things that really matter? These are very much philosophical questions.

Your research also deals with ethics. Do you have any particular leaning towards any branch of ethics? – What is your rationale on the study of ethics?

I don’t have much in the way of philosophical allegiances, and my outlook mostly gelled early on before I’d read any philosophy. (I was a weird kid, and my parents, an artist and a physicist, were very philosophical, so that much of my work is trying to bring out ideas I picked up from them.) But in practice, my views are pretty mongrel, a mix of Kant, Aristotle, and especially Hume and Mill.

In terms of method, I tend to approach ethics roughly with the outlook of a scientist. Yet I think there are objective goods like beauty and excellence, even though it’s all ultimately just a projection of the human mind. I don’t know how to look at Notre Dame burning and not mourn a tremendous loss to the world, and not simply on account of consumers not getting what they want. We’re just wired that way.

As for why I do ethics, in my case, the reason is that it’s fundamental to dealing with our problems as a species. Many of our ideas about how to live are terribly unwise, and I think our survival as a species, or at least a civilization, depends on getting a better grip on what matters in life. The traditional moralities more or less died a few centuries ago, and we still haven’t figured out what to replace them with.

In your publication, ‘Happiness – A Very Short Introduction’ (published by Oxford University Press), you refer both to happiness as a state of mind (feelings) and life satisfaction (a judgement about one’s life). In your view where should the focus be to lead a good life?

There’s no single right way to define ‘happiness’. But I think people’s everyday concerns with happiness are best explained if we regard happiness as a matter of one’s emotional life — emotional well-being. So happiness is roughly the opposite of anxiety and depression. ‘Happiness’ can have a frivolous ring, but it isn’t frivolous at all, any more than mental health is. Our emotional conditions aren’t just fleeting feelings; they pervade the psyche and profoundly shape how we confront the world. Happiness, in my view, lies at the centre of human flourishing, and unhappiness signals a poor fit between the person and her life: it doesn’t suit her nature. It isn’t all that matters in life, but it’s pretty high on the list.
Now life satisfaction is a mental state that expresses your sense of how your life is going by your standards. This is basically an opinion, and not too hard to change — just visit a hospital and think how lucky you are. So the attitude itself isn’t terribly important. But what it’s about matters a great deal: we value things other than just being happy, like being good parents, and life satisfaction measures can give us information about that. It’s just that life satisfaction isn’t important in the way happiness seems to be.

Can happiness and well-being be compatible with the human condition — a universal condition, so it seems that fuels in many human beings, greed, envy, pride, an unsatisfied craving for unlimited wants and self-aggrandisement?

Absolutely, but it’s very difficult to pull off unless we build societies that tamp down the Hobbesian aspects of our nature that you’re referring to. Hobbes thought we needed Leviathan to keep them in check, but brute force isn’t a stable solution. Much more effective is an environment that makes people want not to be that way, like a culture that fosters cooperation, empathy and respect. For example, places like Denmark have social norms that discourage status-seeking and acquisitiveness, and limit inequalities so people can form some sense of solidarity and aren’t so easily caught up in positional “arms races.”

Also, there’s mounting evidence that the Hobbesian picture is parochial and very incomplete because human nature not only has those dark aspects, but also a strong prosocial orientation. By and large, human beings want to help others, to love and be loved, and so on.

It’s parochial because the “human condition” looks quite different in many societies, especially in certain less affluent areas where social ties are very strong, and people tend to look out for each other.

It’s easy for those of us who have “careers” — what an ugly word— to forget that not everyone is trying to climb ladders, and in some places that’s considered repugnant.

You aptly mention in your book that while money can be a source of happiness, it does not contribute to additional happiness above a certain point. Yet our economies are based on the maximisation of possible income. In the light of this assumption how can our economies be redirected to provide the optimal happiness to every person?

There’s a debate about whether happiness stops increasing above a certain income or even goes down at some certain point, but there’s no question you get diminishing returns. But it’s very hard to make simple claims about the money-happiness relationship because it depends on our choices and money doesn’t travel alone. Richer people might have more rewarding jobs, but also work longer hours and so forth, and that sort of thinking probably has more to do with the income-happiness relationship than how much stuff you can buy.

A further challenge is that stress is probably the aspect of happiness most affected by income but it’s also the part that’s hardest to measure. But I think there’s a general consensus that money’s impact on well-being is modest enough above a certain point that it tends not to be a very important goal beyond whatever you need to live comfortably.

That said, what you’re asking is one of the key questions we’re facing, and I don’t know the answer, partly because economies, like ecosystems, are not trivial to manage. In terms of issues to focus on, reducing inequality and increasing access to rewarding work are fairly obvious targets.

It will also be important to make economies more resilient in the face of stressors like climate change and mass migration. Part of this is empowering people to meet needs at a local level. A strong sense of community helps, because then you can rely on neighbours rather than having to buy everything.
This can also help with an even bigger issue: reducing the cost, financially and ecologically, of happiness. To a great extent, we decide collectively and individually how important to make money for happiness. Where I live, the monetary side of happiness is quite steep and nearly half of households don’t make enough to pay the bills even for basic things. If you want to live simply it’ll be hard to get decent healthcare or schools for your kids because we’ve chosen to couple those things strongly to income.

At the same time, our ecological footprint is massive from having little choice but to consume resources at something like 50-100 times the historical average. We need to figure out how to enjoy the best fruits of modern living without undermining so many other things we care about, like relationships, peace of mind, and the environment.

“Development” is a curious word, as if everyone should want to live like an American or German. I’d suggest a developed economy is one that works for the people who live in it without too many costs to others, and there might be lots of different models for that. I’m not sure any of the rich countries are developed in that sense.

You cite many sources of happiness in your book. I was struck by one of your references to the connection with the natural world as a potential source of happiness. Given that humanity at present is showing a lack of commitment towards climate change, pollution, loss of biodiversity and other environmental issues, how will this have an impact on the general level happiness of humanity?

We’re very adaptable and natural beauty is abundant, so the environment can take quite a beating and still be a great source of happiness. I’m well aware that the flora and fauna outside my window here in St.Louis are badly compromised compared to the past, but they’re still beautiful. So I take heart in the thought that there will still be much for future generations to enjoy, even if much is lost. If the environment degrades too much even for that, then happiness will be the least of our worries.

Practically speaking, though, we have work to do to restore our connections with the natural world. There’s no substitute for having active engagement with nature as a regular part of one’s routine, so that for instance you become intimately familiar with the rhythms and denizens of some patch of land or sea, which was my experience for much of my youth. But we can at least improve opportunities for connecting with nature in our communities and promote a culture of appreciating the natural world.

It would help a great deal if we learned to slow down and give ourselves space to unwind. The enjoyment of nature may be the first casualty of our cult of busyness. Just the fact that many people find it boring is a telling sign of how many of us are basically broken human beings, unable to relax and enjoy life. Which includes, sometimes, just doing nothing.
The country, society and the culture you are born into also have a significant impact on one's mood propensity to happiness. Happiness can also be influenced by genetic make-up and the circumstances of life. Do you think humans have free will to change their emotional condition towards happiness and well-being?

Certainly, but it’s harder than most self-help books would have you believe, and I think the idea that “happiness is a choice” is very damaging because it puts the blame for unhappiness on the individual. If your way of life is nuts because you can barely juggle a tedious job and your family responsibilities, and the kids are having trouble, then it isn’t helpful to be told to just turn that frown upside-down.

There are things you can do, like change your lifestyle to something that better suits your nature. Move, change occupations, exercise, etc. I think people tend to underestimate their options for changing how they live but still, there aren’t always great options. The other approach is to change how you respond to things, meditation and other forms of mind training for instance, and this generally takes time and effort. So there’s lots we can do but no simple and easy solution, and no single approach that’s best for everyone.

But I’m more interested in the social side of the picture than these kinds of personal efforts. There are places where people are pretty happy without having to work at it, and I’d like us to build a society like that - where people don’t need self-help books, because the culture and way of life make sense for human beings. Our happiness industry is a bit like zookeepers scratching their heads over why the pandas don’t mate and trying various tricks to make it work, when maybe the problem is that pandas don’t especially like living in zoos.

I believe that the past four years, under the Trump Administration and his persistent refusal to concede defeat of the 2020 election (at the time of writing) exposed the deep divide in American politics. Further to that, are the incidents occurring in the USA induced perhaps by the gun ownership rights and culture. Not to forget to mention also the fatal deaths of many Black Americans perpetrated by armed police forces. Do you think that your country which enshrines the right for everyone to pursue happiness can be a model of happiness to other countries? What can it learn from others?

Every culture has something others can learn from, and the US is no exception. There is a powerful streak of optimism in our culture, and a can-do spirit that fosters a sense of personal agency and unleashes a lot of creative energy. There is also an openness and friendliness to Americans, as well as an aversion to social hierarchies. To a great extent I think all of these qualities are admirable and good for us. They’re part of what I love about the country — blue state and red state, and I’m a bit of both.
But yes, we do have a few problems. We’ve taken individualism too far, and can’t seem to come to grips with the fact that we no longer live on the frontier. Even in better times we were letting millions of our own go without decent prospects for a good life, and burning through the planet’s resources like trust-fund kids on a bender. In the current reality, our ethic of self-reliance and personal responsibility has gotten so distorted that it’s devolved into rank irresponsibility toward others and a monstrously inflated sense of entitlement and grievance. Folks even feel entitled to construct individual realities, for heaven’s sake. But we’re not always entitled to our own opinions. On many questions there are well-established facts and it is irresponsible to ignore them.

So we’ve taken individualism to cartoonish extremes, leaving us lonely, divided, angry and sick. A mature sense of civic and social responsibility isn’t alien to the culture — we pulled together and made the sacrifices asked of us in WWII—but it seems to have gone on holiday, and we need to get it back. Today’s inauguration has made me more hopeful, but we’ll see if people really want to change.

Looking toward other cultures, indigenous and small-scale societies offer a window into very different ways of living and being, and it is good to remember that even hunter-gatherer societies can provide everything people need to be happy. Surely we can figure it out too.

Seeing which countries responded well to the pandemic is a decent indicator of how to get the nuts and bolts of civilization right. Education, universal healthcare and other forms of social insurance are pretty obvious ways to promote happiness.

Beyond the nuts and bolts, we could learn a lot from countries where the culture fosters a keen appreciation of beauty and craftsmanship, for instance Southern Europe. And “enjoyer” cultures, like Latin America, stress warm relationships and the enjoyment of life, which we “strivers” north of the border could use a lot more of. Boy, we could use more of that.

In your book, you mention the importance of relationships to happiness and you imply that strong communal ties provide much more happiness than cultures that promote individualism. Does it worry you that the onset of technology can be a means of destruction to communal ties and a contribution to higher levels of individualism? How can communal ties be rebuilt in the Liberal West?

I used to work in the tech industry and love gadgets, but obviously we need to figure out a better way to live with them. The more convenient and entertaining it becomes to be alone, the higher the costs of bothering to interact with others, which is frequently awkward and rarely the most convenient option. Tech does make some kinds of connection easier, but I don’t even know how to argue with somebody who thinks that texting and speechifying at each other on Twitter are some kind of substitute for a face-to-face conversation.

One reason I harp on about things like beauty and excellence is that once you recognize that something out there matters beyond people getting whatever they happen to want, you’re not so likely to think it’s a good idea to just do whatever you feel like. You become less a consumer, more an appreciator, who sees the world as something that makes claims on you, and isn’t just there to satisfy your whims. You need to look up from your device and pay attention to the people, to the beauty, around you, because it isn’t just about you. It shouldn’t be perfectly normal to see a room full of individuals face-down in their phones amusing themselves, together but alone.
Another key aspect of happiness for humans are sex, love and long-term relationship with a soul mate. Do you think that monogamy is the best path towards happiness in providing the optimum balance of these three conflicting elements?

I suspect it is, at least for most people. But it would be good if our other relationships were strong enough that a life partner didn’t have to play such an overwhelming role in one’s life, and also so that more people could be involved in helping raise the kids, and so on. Where I live, it’s a pain in the neck to get together with other people, so you’d better like doing everything with your partner. That also puts more of a premium on finding a “soulmate,” which is a wonderful thing if you can get it—and I’ve been very lucky on that count—but not so easy.

In your view, what government policies should be primarily pursued to guarantee a minimum standard of happiness and well-being to every citizen?

I don’t think people are owed happiness. But I do think it’s a matter of common decency for a society of means to ensure that everyone has access to healthcare, education, and the other requisites of a good life. On the frontier you didn’t let your neighbours starve or refuse to lend a hand when they needed it, and neither should we. Economic policies that reduce inequality and unemployment are also important. I’m not sure what we owe the global poor, except more than we’re doing for them now.

More directly focused on happiness, a few things that come to mind are better urban planning so that our communities are both more sustainable and actually feel like communities, as well as changing schools to better equip students to flourish in their lives. Also, shorter work hours to address the time poverty most of us are living with.

In a world where our lives are becoming ruled and governed by algorithms, social media, virtual environments and artificial intelligence, are you optimistic or pessimistic about the future state of happiness for humanity?

Maybe what you could call a sardonic optimist. I think it’s important to be hopeful and look forward to the best. But we can’t kid ourselves about the scale of the challenges we’re facing, which take a dark sense of humour to confront without giving yourself a bellyache. So far, we’ve not made a good showing in terms of our ability to wisely harness technology, so yes that could cause all manner of mischief.

But at this point just about the only problem I’m really concerned with is the survival of civilization because of climate change. I think we’ll figure out a way through this bottleneck, and we’d better, because it’ll make all our other worries moot. It’s hard enough already to keep the economy from going off the rails; how do we maintain a decent standard of living if we’re dealing with disappearing coastlines, farmland turning to dust, and wars over resources? And it takes around 10 million years for the planet to recover from the kind of mass extinction we’re heading toward, which would be some legacy. So guns, virtual realities, racism, whatever, it’s all small potatoes if we don’t get a grip on this one.

This is one of the main reasons I study happiness: it may not seem very important if mere survival is in the balance, but a large part of our problem has to do with the way we’ve been pursuing happiness, and generally our ideas about what makes for a good life. Without more sensible ideas about the lives we want to lead, it’s going to be hard to solve these problems.
Davidson starts his essay by mentioning three commonly held views about the role of language in our thinking about the world.

The first view is that language is a ‘transparent’ medium ‘that simply reproduces for the mind, or accurately records, what is out there.’

The second view is that language is so ‘dense’ or ‘opaque’ that it hides the real thing from us, so that one cannot tell what the world is really like. This is Kant’s view.

The third view is that language is something ‘in between’: a ‘translucent’ material ‘leaving its own character written on everything in its domain,’ so that the world ‘bears the tint and focus of the particular languages we speak.’ A radical consequence of this third position would be that all our views about the world are ‘necessarily distorted’, a view Davidson attributes to Bergson ‘and many others.’
Davidson rejects all these views. The second position (Kant’s), that we never perceive the world as it really is, could only be defended ‘if it were possible, in principle at least, to isolate some unconceptualised given which could be shaped by the mind, for then it might make sense to imagine a multitude of structures within which the given would be shaped.’ It is hard to imagine what this ‘unconceptualised given’ would be like.

It would be equally hard to understand what we mean by a real alternative to our conceptual scheme. ‘If a scheme could be described by us,’ Davidson writes, ‘then it would not, by this very token, be all that different from ours.’ The trouble with the idea of languages and conceptual schemes that are genuinely (i.e. radically) different from ours is not that we couldn’t understand them, but that the criteria for what would constitute such languages or conceptual schemes ‘are simply unclear.’

Even if we don’t understand the concept of radically different ways of thinking and talking, doesn’t it make sense to hold ‘that our actual languages mould our perception of the world to such an extent that what we take in is always distorted?’ Davidson replies that the fact that language reflects our interests, needs and values … hardly supports the claim that language seriously distorts or shapes our understanding of the world.

Truth is not bent or distorted by language. If it is true that our planet is getting warmer, then whatever people say will not affect the truth of the matter in any way. Most of our declarative utterances, Davidson says, are simply true or false, not true then but false now, not true for me and false for you, not partly false and partly true. ‘Our languages do not distort the truth about the world, though of course they allow us to deceive ourselves and others’ about what things in the world are really like – as we do when we deny that the planet is getting warmer.

With regard to the first view, ‘the idea that language is transparent, a medium that can accurately represent the facts,’ Davidson says that ‘this too is an idea with no cash value … If in saying that language represents facts, we mean no more than that we can use sentences to describe objects and events, no harm is done. This is, after all, just a fancy version of the platitude that some sentences are true and some false. But we deceive ourselves when we talk of language representing reality (or anything else) unless we can usefully specify the entities represented.’

It is as much a mistake to think of language as mirroring or representing reality as it is to think of our senses as presenting us with no more than appearances. ‘Presentations or representations as mere proxies or pictures will always leave us one step short of what knowledge seeks; scepticism about the power of language to capture what is real is old-fashioned scepticism of the senses given a linguistic twist.’ Davidson draws an analogy between having eyes and ears and having language: ‘all three are organs with which we come into direct contact with our environment. They are not intermediaries, screens, media, or windows.’

Every group and society have a language, ‘and all languages are apparently constrained by the same arbitrary rules. Tribes we consider primitive have languages as complex and complete as those of developed cultures.’
Davidson follows Chomsky in holding that all languages share deep structural rules despite surface differences. The evidence for this is the discovery of universal constraints on grammars. This explains the ease with which children acquire language, the speed at which language develops, as well as the fact that all languages are mutually translatable, so that one could learn all the languages one wanted to, if one had the time.

Though Davidson finds ‘little reason to doubt that we are genetically programmed in fairly specific ways to speak as we do,’ he strongly rejects the view, held by Fodor and others, that what is innate – that is, genetically programmed – is an internal language, the language of thought, or mentalese. Language, Davidson insists, is not something that comes between us and reality; ‘it can’t come between, since it is part of us.’ Postulating a language of thought turns our spoken language into an intermediary between thought and what thought is about, and thus ‘would threaten to hide or distort the world in much the same way Kant thought the architecture of the mind does.’

There is no reason to suppose that ideas, concepts or meanings are innate. ‘What we are born with,’ Davidson says, ‘or what emerge in the normal course of early childhood, are constraints on syntax, not semantics.’

For Davidson, language is not an ordinary learned skill, but a mode of perception; and this is why he devotes a substantial part of his essay to describing how perceptual beliefs are formed, and how they may be corrected, before going on to describe, in the final section, the conditions that are necessary for the development of thought and language.

The basic requirement is for two persons, A and B, say, to react in concert to features of the world and to each other’s reactions. This kind of triangular interaction between creatures and a shared environment, Davidson observes, occurs with great frequency among animals that neither think nor talk. Two other things are present in linguistic communication and developed thought. The first is the concept of error, ‘appreciation of the distinction between belief and truth.’ But we grasp the concept of truth only when we can communicate the contents of the shared experience – and this requires language. ‘The primitive triangle … thus provides the framework in which thought, and language can evolve.’

Davidson’s account shows that ‘neither thought nor language can come first, for each requires the other.’ It shows that ‘the abilities to speak, perceive and think develop together, gradually. We perceive the world through language, that is, through having language.’

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Liberation theology is an attempt to build a synthesis between Christian theology and the socio-economic field, inspired by the principles of Marxism, that emphasise social concern for the poor and political liberation for the oppressed. Since its onset in the 1950s and up to the beginning of the new millennium, this liberation theology has been the political praxis of Latin American theologians, such as Gustavo Gutiérrez, Leonardo Boff, Juan Luis Segundo, and Jon Sobrino among others, who popularized the "Preferential option for the poor" as the Guiding Star for their theory and praxis of theology.

Throughout its process, there have often been moments of conflict and tension between Marxism and Theology rather than dialogue. Nevertheless, the unique socio-cultural circumstances and political context in late 20th century Latin America brought together people from both camps who shared a common ideal of justice, fraternity, and equality. The background for that dialogue was the Cold War, where the United States, in its efforts to block the spread of communism in the continent started supporting the autocratic military regimes that were ruling most of the Latin American states.
The Latin American Episcopal Conference

After the Second Vatican Council that was concluded in 1965, the Latin American Episcopal Conference (CELAM) called for a Conference of bishops from the entire Latin America region in Medellin - Colombia. The conference of Medellin in 1968 issued a document with pastoral guidance for the Church in the continent. In 1979, Mexico ratified the same lines of action in another conference held in the same country at Puebla. Both documents stress that poverty in Latin America is caused by the unjust division of the riches that God provides for all. They also set an emphasis in the Preferential option for the poor.

Apart from the inspiring contents of the documents, the most effective measure introduced was the methodology used for the structure of the document itself as well as the groundwork laid for most of the Church’s meetings from bishop conferences to youth gatherings.

The methodology consists of three steps:

- **To see**: Analysing the present situation by identifying the root cause of problems, and possible resources, that could be harnessed

- **To discern(judge)**: Searching in the Bible and traditional teachings of the Church inspiration to illuminate the situation with faith and hope.

- **To act**: Proposing in every document, meeting or study, practical steps aimed at solving the problems which the people of the Latin American states have to face. The last step injected a new energy by prompting the Church to take concrete action. This marked a departure from other meetings which would normally end by urging people to pray. The new method adopted in these gatherings consisted of endorsing a number of concrete measures that would supplement the call for prayer.

So, the dialogue between theologians and Marxist enthusiasts did not simply translate into an exchange of ideas and theories, but in a series of events calling for a common stand against the authoritarian regimes that held sway across the continent of Latin America.

Quo Vadis?

The beginning of the 90’s marked the return of democracy for most of the countries of Latin America. This development tempered the urgency of Church intervention in the political arena. Of course this does not mean that the mission has been accomplished. There is still a lot to be done in the social field and in the fight for justice and equality in the Latin American countries. However the focus has now been shifted and is moving towards a more holistic approach that includes the care for the environment.

This shift was reinforced by the election of Cardinal Bergoglio as Pope, who assumed the name of Francis, the patron of ecology. One of the Pope’s first documents was the encyclical letter “Laudato Si” which sets a clarion call to care for the earth, our common home. Furthermore the Amazon Synod summoned by the Pope in October of 2019 raises the church’s attention towards the preservation of the people and forest of this distinct ecological territory.

The preparation document uses the same methodology of Medellin and Puebla documents, to see, to judge and to act. There has been vocal protests and criticisms from certain traditional segments of the Church, who are contending that the working document contains certain heresies. The document uses Latin American theology, which prefers to use symbols rather than precise concepts. So, for example, the document speaks of “mother-earth”, a term that is labelled pantheistic by the conservative faction of the Church.

The document is not likely to bring about any drastic changes in the teaching and operations of the Church. However, it is a new call for a renewal and opening of theology in an innovative way by following the same principles and values of the Theology of Liberation and other movements.

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Difference and Migration from a Gramscian Lens

By Peter Mayo

German sociologist, Ursula Apitzsch, in a chapter in Solidarity without Borders (Pluto Press, 2016) points to Gramsci’s comments on the culturalist view of migration, as it applies to Francesco Perri’s novel Gli Emigranti (The Emigrants).

Perri places more focus on the place of settlement as far as migration to foreign lands go, and hardly any emphasis on the complex and differentiated context of origin. Peasants in the fictitious village Pandure occupy the land, as a result of Joachim Murat’s laws, but are cast off by the carabinieri. The conditions in the context of origin which compelled people to leave in search of pastures new is a problématique writers such as Perri ignore.

Gramsci states that Perri ignores and therefore fails to provide a chronology of events, has a superficial knowledge of Calabrian peasant life and therefore lapses into homogenisation of people and groups, perpetuating stereotypes in the process. Writers like Perri do not see the question of regional and Southern industrial underdevelopment for what it is, a case of internal colonialism by the North over the South. A historically nuanced analysis of contexts of migrants’ origins is called for. This also brings to the fore economic questions for it is one of Gramsci’s merits that his analyses combined both cultural and economic aspects.

While Gramsci eschewed economic reductionism, he regarded it still as a key aspect of life which is ignored at one’s peril. A historical chronological occlusion, a feature, according to Gramsci, of Francesco Perri’s novel, would obscure the role of economic factors that impinge on the cultures, changing cultures, of immigrants in both their region or country of origin and the receiving territory. As Hall points out, the cultural interacts with other variables and, though the economy is not over deterministic, it still remains an important factor to be reckoned with.

What has Gramsci to tell us about one form of difference, that of ethnicity brought about through the phenomenon of migration?

One major challenge is that of migration and the onset of inter-ethnicity in most of Italy and other countries. This was hardly the case in Gramsci’s time when the two blocs concerning North and South were the industrial and agrarian ones. He wrote of the desire for a new historical bloc, more than just an alliance as this is meant to be deep-seated. It was the bloc between industrial workers and peasants, social class blocs which now have to intersect with different ethnicities and cultural traditions: traditions of knowledge, of artistic expression and of wisdom.

Gramsci did prepare some groundwork for this analysis in his writings spanning a more global context focusing among others on Arab and Islamic contributions to ‘Western civilisation’. These issues nowadays strike close to his and our homes.
Contemporary works around emigration are increasing around the world, including Southern Europe, given the mass migration across the central Mediterranean route into Italy and other places. Work such as *Bilal* by journalist, Fabrizio Gatti (2007), who joined migrants, under cover (as a migrant) at their point of departure in Africa and accompanied them on the route across the Sahara into North Africa and across the Mediterranean into Sicily, helps shed light on the long trajectory involved.

This kind of analysis becomes all the more urgent as migration is a topic that continues to feature also in theatrical works, one recent play in England and Scotland being *What Shadows*, which I saw staged at the Park Theatre, London, two years ago and which focuses on the ramifications of Enoch Powell’s House of Commons speech in 1968 about immigration (Hannan, 2016). The play, featuring Ian Mcdiarmid as Powell, focuses on the situation of migrant life in the country of destination especially for second generation migrants.

A Gramscian analysis would call for some indication of the conditions in the former colonies, analysed in a nuanced manner. It would indicate general and different conditions that led to the situation the Wolverhampton MP and Classics scholar created such a furore about.

Apart from literary responses to the phenomenon of migration, there is also a challenge which takes us back to education discussed in detail early on. Gramsci speaks of thoughts, floating around in his time of including, in teacher-education programmes, knowledge of different cultures throughout the peninsula. Gramsci is concerned that student-teachers’ risk being exposed to fixed notions of people hailing from different regions, an essentialising and folkloric discourse.

As Apitszch stresses, as seen in Gramsci’s Quaderno these cultures are made to looks as something bizarre (*bizzarria*) that needs to be overcome (the implication is that teacher-education can help ‘destroy’ these cultures).

My reading is that, to the contrary, Gramsci hopes for an exposure which does justice to these cultures in all their complexity, cultures which would be presented as organic and dynamic. I would add, in a Gramscian vein, that it would be an exposure that helps prospective teachers see the ‘good sense’ in each of the cultures to appreciate further the elements that would make up the ‘national-popular’.

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For Putnam, as for Socrates, the central philosophical question was how to live our lives and how to order our societies. Hence the focus on practice and its inherently moral nature by a philosopher who in the Fifties started addressing deep metaphysical questions in the philosophy of science and mathematics, before becoming more and more aware of the fact that "metaphysics without ethics is blind" (Putnam 1976: 92). But what does this mean?

2. For a philosopher of science who takes science at face value, the world as it arises from our best scientific theories constitutes the whole or part of our picture of the world — our metaphysical picture. Moreover, the natural sciences provide a genuine knowledge of the world, and this kind of knowledge constitutes the whole or part of our conceptual system. This is the point of view called ‘naturalism’, which — as the repeated phrase points out — can come in at least two varieties.

The former variety is an instance of reductionism in that it reduces all the knowledge worthy of the name to the knowledge provided by the natural sciences (the other non-reducible kinds of knowledge being deemed no knowledge at all), and it also reduces all the complexity we see in the world to the world described by the natural sciences. Tables and chairs don’t actually exist, despite appearances: it is atoms and electric charges constituting them that do exist.

At the beginning of his career Putnam inclined toward this radical variety of naturalism, but already by the Seventies he realized that it was a wrong standpoint to take, and utterly denied that scientific knowledge, however important, is all of our knowledge:
“I do not believe that ethical statements are expressions of scientific knowledge; but neither do I agree they are not knowledge at all. The idea that the concepts of truth, falsity, explanation, and even understanding are all concepts which belong exclusively to science seems to me to be a perversion. That Adolf Hitler was a monster seems to me to be a true statement (and even a ‘description’ in any ordinary sense of ‘description’), but the term ‘monster’ is neither reducible to nor eliminable in favour of ‘scientific’ vocabulary” (Putnam 1975: xiii-xiv).

This quotation discloses the latter variety of naturalism, which following Mario De Caro and David Macarthur, Putnam called liberal naturalism. It allows for the existence of non-scientific entities and forms of understanding — e.g. art criticism, social analysis, and political evaluation — while avoiding commitment to anything supernatural. In order to realize the revolutionary impact liberal naturalism may have on our culture suffices it to appreciate how it leads to dismantling the traditional dichotomy between natural sciences and human sciences, in particular the dichotomy between facts and values it embeds.

3. The idea that the human sciences are utterly distinct from the natural sciences was based on the conviction that only the latter possess the resources to acquire genuine objective knowledge, given that they purportedly deal with mind-independent facts about the natural non-human world. In contrast, human sciences are the realm of values which, notoriously, are tied to a given cultural milieu and are therefore subjective in character. Thus, it seems that no objective conclusion can be drawn from them, no conclusion susceptible to be true and to express an actual piece of knowledge. It seems, in other words, that the task of the human sciences isn’t that of describing and explaining facts, for the simple reason that nothing to describe and explain appears in their fields.

This is the view that has been informing our culture at least from the birth of modern science in the 1600’s, went through the Enlightenment and was revived by Neopositivism till mid of the last century. Putnam contributed to the reformation of this secular tradition in the following way.

He emphasized that this presupposes a notion of fact as exclusively tied to our sensory experience, and made us aware that, if we work on the basis of such an impoverished notion, then it is no wonder that ethical judgments turn out not to be ‘factual’. A more careful look reveals not only that scientific knowledge is about facts regarding not directly observable entities, but also that it presupposes a specific kind of values — epistemic values such as coherence, comprehensiveness, instrumental efficacy, plausibility, reasonableness, simplicity and the like. Once we realize that facts and values are deeply intertwined even in the field of the natural sciences, the alleged dichotomy between them collapses, and this collapse uncovers the possibility of talking about facts in the field of the human sciences too — facts guaranteeing the objective validity of the many claims we make about ethical, aesthetical, political, social issues. The revolutionary impact on our culture I alluded to above resides precisely in broadening rational discussion to cover spheres mistakenly deemed entirely subjective.

Failing to realize this leads to attempts at gaining a picture of the world that don’t take into account the values that make us human — the values that guide us in envisaging ways of understanding how to live our lives and how to order our societies. It leads to a metaphysics that appears to be blind when not sensibly backed up by ethics — and all the other human sciences, for that matter. Hence the rare versatility of the fox Putnam who, year after year, came to embody philosophy itself.

References:

To get an extent of Hilary Putnam’s writings, Cf. http://putnam.altervista.org/
Throughout the past decades, the work of the French philosopher Jacques Derrida has been received with a mix of adoration and disdain; while some have heralded him as one of the greatest thinkers of the twentieth century, others described his thought as amounting to nothing more than an “obscurantist terrorism” designed to destroy the very foundations of reason, science, and academic rigor.

Despite these divergent views, the vast majority of his proponents and detractors have, until recently, shared the view that his work amounts to an anti-realism which rests on the premiss that it is impossible for humans to get beyond the limits of “language” in order to think the workings of reality as it is in and of itself.

In spite of this well diffused interpretation of Derrida, in recent years there have also been a small but steadily increasing number of thinkers who are seeking to move away from these anti-realist interpretations in order to provide alternative realist and/or materialist analyses of his work.

Deborah Goldgaber’s *Speculative Grammatology* represents one such example of these newly emerging interpreters of Derrida and deconstruction. More specifically, Goldgaber sets out to show that Derrida is to be read as delivering a powerful challenge to a contemporary (post-Kantian) form of anti-realism which the French philosopher Quentin Meillassoux dubs “correlationism.”

Briefly stated, the latter refers to any philosophical position which deems thought and being to be intrinsically intertwined, to the effect that it would be impossible to attain knowledge of being itself independently of thought.

Throughout this book, Goldgaber builds a solid case for her claim that Derridean deconstruction must in fact, and against received opinion, be read in terms of a critique of correlationism *avant la lettre*. 
Jacques Derrida born in Algeria, was a French philosopher best known for developing a form of semiotic analysis known as deconstruction, which he analyzed in numerous texts, and developed in the context of phenomenology. He is one of the major figures associated with post-structuralism and postmodern philosophy.

This is to the extent that his notion of the “text” qua différence – Derrida’s name for a process of spatio-temporal differing/deferring – and arché-writing present speculative material structures which account for the conditions of possibility for both language and experience, but which nevertheless must be thought as anterior to the latter. In other words, she argues that through the notion of the “text,” Derrida identifies a “extra-correlational instance” which cannot be correlated back exclusively to human consciousness, language, or experience more generally.

Yet Goldgaber does not simply stop there. She decidedly pushes Derrida’s work beyond the bounds of human experience when she argues that the notion of the “text” (or “writing”) in its broadest Derridean sense names any mark which “survives” in its readability in the radical absence of any sender or receiver broadly conceived. The “text” – and cognate terms such as différences and arché-writing – is therefore not simply “linguistic,” but rather refers more generally to any and all material structures.

Put another way, such Derridean notions represent absolutely general material conditions which move beyond the narrow (empirical) conception of writing, such that they account for the broadest possible “ultra-transcendental” conditions for the reality itself as a material differential system based on inscription and repeatability, but which is nevertheless not reducible to a “metaphysics of presence” which attempts to correlate thought and being itself.

This book will be of particular relevance to readers who are interested in the reception of Derrida’s philosophy in twenty-first century thought, and especially in that of Speculative Realism and New Materialism.

In her publication ‘Speculative Grammatology and the New Materialism, Deborah Goldgaber looks mainly at Derrida’s early work, the three texts published in 1967 - Of Grammatology, Speech and Phenomena and Writing and Difference - and opens the conversation between deconstruction and speculative realism.

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The ideal upon which this manifesto is formulated is Aristotle’s position that a rational and free agent requires certain political conditions to enable one to live a good life.

In the Nicomachian Ethics, Aristotle asserts that the good life for a human being partly consists in philosophical contemplation which can be carried on quite independently of other people and partly in exercise of social virtues which can be exercised in the company of others. Aristotle’s doctrine that a human being is by nature a political animal implies that that the good life requires a particular kind of political state.

At a minimum, every human being is entitled to the following requirements for human well-being – good housing, healthcare, clean water, safe food, access to energy, good education, an income, a political voice, and justice [1].

The central philosophical question that follows is: what type of society should be constructed to ensure or rather guarantee that all citizens can flourish and make a valid contribution?

Before proceeding, certain inevitabilities of the human condition have to be acknowledged in order to avoid falling into the trap of utopian dreaming.

- Human beings are part of nature. We are, by definition, animals, and a part of the greater ecosystem. We need clear air, clean water, and food from the earth to survive.

- Human behaviour depends to a great extent on the culture of the particular society into which one is born. Culture varies from one society to the other. This diversity may be a possible source of stereotyping.

A socially stratified system that involves a hierarchy of groups tends to be inherent in every society. This system based on power relations emanating from class, status, race, and gender is deeply embedded and very difficult to eradicate.

Cooperation, order, and stability in society tend to be highly dependent on a particular group in society which constitutionally can wield power over the members of society. The relationship between the rulers and the ruled is often the source of overt or covert conflict.

Society relies heavily on an organisational set up which creates dominant institutions. This organisational structure has been instrumental in setting up a world of work characterised by an increasingly specialised division of labour, a hierarchy of authority and bureaucracy.

However much marital relationships may have changed, the family remains a universal social institution and the cornerstone of society.

In spite of the progress made to ensure equality between men and women, stereotyped gender roles remain difficult to eradicate.

A sense of consensus and harmony is likely to prevail in every society. However conformity is never total. This means that society has to contend with those who dare to challenge the mainstream culture of society. These challenges can have negative as well as positive effects.

From the foregoing one must conclude that the requisites of a good life have to be supplemented by:

**The Family**

Relationships with family members and significant others provide the warmth, security, and mutual support that can thereby assure a sense of security and stability. This can act as a counterweight to the stresses and strains that have to be endured in our daily life.

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**The Good Society**

**Minimum Entitlement to individual well-being:**

**Supplemented by:**
- The Family
- Organisational Life
- Individualism and Non-conformist Behaviour
- The Market

**New Realities:**
- Better Work Life Balance
- Measuring Societies Well-Being beyond GDP Growth
- Universal Basic Income
- Citizens’ Participation in Policy Making

**The Ultimate Goal**
Sustainability:
Economic Growth is achieved within the ambit of a health eco-system
One has however to be wary of the dark side of the family which can be characterised by domestic violence and/or oppressive behaviour. The various models of the family that have evolved can be a means of escape for the victims of this dark side of the family.

It has to be recognised that there have been major changes in patterns of family life since the post-war period. The prime movers for these changes have been the emancipation of women in the labour force, contraception, rise of divorce rates and substantial increase in single parents. Cohabitation has become increasingly common and marriage has ceased to be the condition of regular sex experience for either sex.

In order to provide and ensure social order and stability, decision making has to be based on valid and reliable empirical data. Social research centres and think-tanks should be set up to provide valid and reliable data about the inter-relationship of the spouses. Such research work should be an ongoing process. Divorce should not be easy to obtain but neither should it be rendered a difficult and tortuous process. The policies adopted by government to deal with such delicate issues might have a long lasting effect on all members of society especially the younger ones.

In dealing with other alternative sexual behaviour such as prostitution and sexual promiscuity, prohibition should not be imposed by social custom. A fine line has to be drawn between the permissive outlook on sexuality as prevalent in the West and repressive policies that are adopted in more conservative societies. The laws of nature have to be acknowledged without undermining equal gender rights and opportunities.

**Organisational Life**

Valid data emanating from scientific social research should be the tool of analyses in order to assess (a) the impact of organisational life which is based on the division of labour and bureaucratic structures and (b) the procedures that tend to stifle the innate creative spirit of human beings.

Marx’s thesis about the alienated workforce is still relevant as a concept. Automation, and digitisation of tasks in the 21st century are not only increasing this degree of alienation but are also making many workers feel increasingly vulnerable.

This sense of alienation and vulnerability are felt more acutely in an age where leisure has become more central in the social life of human beings. In the post-war society leisure has come to occupy a central stage and over time replace work as the central life interest. What is most worrying to the health of the society is when leisure activities are created as a fantasy world into which people can temporarily escape from the daily routine and drudgery of work and find the amusement required to excite and distract them.

Governments should strive to enable their constituents to enjoy self-fulfilling experiences. To achieve this end, questions have to be asked. Does success and economic viability have to be measured in terms of productivity or profits margins? Do we still have to work an eight to five job to get things done? Can organisations make work more meaningful and humane? Do organisations require a hierarchical and top-down structure in order to be efficient and effective?

**Individualism and non-conformist behaviour**

Society has to come to terms with the higher levels of individualism among its members. This individualism need not be perceived as being detrimental to society even though it can lead to nonconformist behaviour. Nonconformity in extreme cases (such as drug abuse, or imprisonment) can lead to social exclusion.

However, a mature society has to find the ways and means to rehabilitate these individuals by helping them to integrate in social and economic spheres of life. The same measures should be taken to deal with mental health patients who need a helping hand to enable them to interact seamlessly with other members of society.
Sustainable environmental economics and investment in renewable technologies must therefore be given top priority in our economic policies.

New Realities

In order to achieve the good life, governments all over the world should urgently strive to instill a new mind-set in the psyche of their citizens. A better work-life balance with shorter working hours should not remain a distant dream. In this respect, one can understand why Danish society tops the countries' lists in the measure for happiness [2].

The philosophy of Epicurus may be highly relevant in this instance. In advocating the pursuit of pleasure to attain a mind of tranquility that is free from fear and the absence of bodily pain, Epicurean philosophy leans towards the pursuit of attitudinal pleasures. The view that the Epicurean philosophy is associated with hedonism is clearly misguided as it recognises that over-indulgence in sensory pleasures can cause bodily pain and disturb the tranquility of the soul.

This Epicurean philosophy also dovetails with Bertrand Russell’s philosophical view as expressed ‘In Praise of Idleness’ (1935). Russell’s central point is that our aim in life should be the free pursuit of pleasurable, worthwhile, and interesting activities. Work needs not be such a central human activity. Towards this end he advocates a four-hour working day in order to allow the individual much more spare time to pursue tasks that would enable the individual to attain the highest possible state of self-actualisation.

This idea could easily be dismissed as a mere form of utopian or pipeline thinking. But the point is that the exponential technological progress achieved by computers, smart phones and information technology has not been utilised to make our lives less stressful and benefit from more hours of leisure. Rather than reducing our workload, digitalisation is being harnessed to create a worker wired for 24 hours a day over a seven day week.

It is therefore imperative that governments across the world be made aware that the economic growth should be measured in terms of other parameters that take into consideration the quality of life of its citizens.

An example of such a measurement is given by the state of Bhutan which adopts the concept of the Gross National Happiness to interrelate it with economic policy. Gross national happiness is measured by Bhutan across the following nine key indicator areas for a happy life – psychological well-being, health, time use, education, cultural diversity, resilience, good governance, community vitality, living standards and ecological diversity [3]. Collective happiness and well-being are measured and prioritized ahead of financial gain. Top priority is given to the environment in the formulation of public and economic policies.

New Zealand followed this approach, when in 2019 under current Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern, the country dropped GDP as its primary measure of success and created its own index based on profit, people, and the planet [4].

Another concept worth pursuing in modern society is the implementation of a universal basic income model that guarantees a minimum safety net to all citizens and more so for the vulnerable. This model could be the first step in alleviating worries and tensions of a society where consumption has become a distinct mark of status. A universal basic income model can also act as a guarantee against the threats of being jobless and expendable. Such threats are also demeaning the value of work and rendering any sets of learned skills as irrelevant and obsolete in the modern marketplace. Naturally the question arises of how such a scheme will be financed in economic terms. This will be further discussed when the Manifesto tackles economic issues.

**Conclusion**

This manifesto is based on the belief, that in order to lead a good life citizens must be given the opportunity to voice their opinions, freely express their thoughts and actively participate in policy making that directly affects their lives, their happiness and well-being. The democratic model of the West must evolve beyond giving the citizens the right to cast their vote to choose who is going to govern. The Western system of governance is still unfortunately dominated by political party partisan politics that tend to breed a tribalist mentality.

It sounds rather ironic that in spite of the developments made in the political world the thesis of Machiavelli remains still relevant. According to this thesis the governing elite fall under two types of animalistic natures - lions who take direct and incisive action and foxes who rule by cunning and guile, diplomatic manipulations, wheeling and dealing.

At the lower end of the spectrum there might also be worrying signs in the sense that the majority of the members of society tend to be detached from or indifferent to the issues that affects our societies. This lack of involvement or interest can undermine the democratic base of society as it can make the manipulative task of politicians easier.

Policy makers have to be held accountable as they must go beyond the here and now and respond to the urgent international call for action to repair and protect our natural environment at all cost if life on earth and the human race are to sustain and survive in the future. All nation states have to respond to the wake-up call that our natural environment must be given top priority. This will be the focus in the next issue.

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