

## Chapter 10

# Market Fundamentalism as Symbolic Violence

### Power Relations Inscribed in Narratives

Among the concepts the French sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu, developed is symbolic violence. In the words of Bruce Caron, an American social activist:

"[It] represents an extension of the term "violence" to include various modes of social/cultural domination. Symbolic violence is the unnoticed (partly unconscious) domination that every-day social habits maintain over the conscious subject, and is not normally "recognized" as violence. For example, gender domination, and gender itself (say, in the construction of sexuality) represents one prominent arena of symbolic violence."<sup>1</sup>

Symbolic violence is thus defined as oppression that is executed within structures of social relationships where it is incubated by oppressive and exploitative behaviour, which often is contingent upon existing norms that the narratives twist into enabling rationalizations for the oppression. The oppression is therefore not directly linked to threats of physical violence, as in traditional force-reliant authoritarian political economies (although force-reliant systems also employ symbolic violence in order to minimize the need for execution of raw force).

Oppression linked to patterns of symbolic violence is an important element in the way exploitative and contested arrangements are imposed upon a populace by political and economic elites. In this function, the symbolic violence mainly operates through two overlapping forms:

A) Memetic narratives (narratives anchored upon memes, or words with constructed and purposive meanings) that inculcate social beliefs built on misrecognitions that are designed to obscure the factual oppression and exploitation perpetrated by a dominant elite. Such social beliefs anchored on misrecognitions become what Bourdieu calls doxa.

B) Status domination, whereby contestable social relationships are attempted removed from the area of contest by invoking the status, or alleged professional competence, of people who act as rationalizers for the exploitative social arrangements.

Memes are word or phrases that are constructed or brought forward in order to promote certain defined interests. Thus, from their inception they are not attempts to simply convey factual observations, or knowledge as elements of a discourse. Their nature and purposes are to change behaviour by twisting perceptions. As a practical matter, memes tend to anchor upon existing, well-recognized social beliefs and cultural norms in order to gain credence and reduce potential resistance. However, they insert

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<sup>1</sup> Caron, Bruce: "Community, Democracy and Performance: The Urban Practice of Kyoto's Higashi-Kujo Madang." Santa Barbara: The New Media Studio. 2003.

twists into the recognized perceptions or norms that produce an appearance of support for the interests of the meme creator (or the interests of his or hers principals). In the current political economy, actual meme creators (outside of the purely commercial use of memes in advertising) are most likely to be the in the modern political landscape ubiquitous spin-doctors and pollsters, often working with support staffs that include high-level scientists in the various relevant social and cognitive fields.

In the general case, when memes inculcate purposive misrecognitions into the public universe of debates, they become building blocks in the construction of the interest-promoting narratives that flourish in the modern political fields. The creation of memes is therefore an important tool of the current political economy's *modus operandi*.

In the case of the neoliberal narratives, the main social conditions that they attempt to divert attention away from are the economic inequalities and the inherently exploitative tendencies incipient to modern market capitalism. In support of this endeavour, the market fundamentalist version of economics have become an important auxiliary by producing memes that anchor on people's vague concepts of what markets are, whereupon it twists these vague connotations into the misrecognition of unfettered markets as an absolute and unquestionable social good under all conditions, even when it—as has been the case in the neoliberal economy—leads to preposterous social and economic inequalities.

When employed as political spin, memes quite often latch on to discriminatory attitudes, since such attitudes, by their propensity to evoke aggression, have shown to be especially effective in diverting attention away from the underlying factual conditions.

An example is Newt Gingrich's claim—enunciated during his failed campaign to gain the 2012 Republican presidential nomination—that children from poor neighbourhoods should be tasked with cleaning the bathrooms and mop the floors in the schools they attend, so that they can develop a proper work ethic, since no one around them (in the poor neighbourhoods) are likely to work unless it is part of illegal activities.<sup>2</sup> This is a case of a 'blame the victim' meme hiding the factual economic exploitative character of modern capitalism, which leads to inequalities that create large islands of poverty, often exhibiting ethnic clustering. For extra effect, the meme is openly discriminatory, since its aim was to elicit support (in the presidential candidate nomination process) from a social group in which the played discriminatory attitudes would resonate. The effectiveness of memes with aggression-evoking discriminatory twists partly explains the predilection of right-wing politicians to employ hot-button cultural issues.

In general, the effects created by the various forms of symbolic violence cause the social beliefs of receptive individuals to twist into states that solidify into inflexible doxical misrecognitions, often without the subjects are aware of the change in their perspectives that constant exposure to the symbolically violent narratives have engendered over time.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://politicalticker.blogs.cnn.com/2011/12/01/gingrich-stands-by-anti-child-labor-law-comments/>

When a set of doxical misrecognitions becomes a dominant expression of identity that is shared within specific social sub-groups, it will create codes of social paroles that combine patterns of speech, dress codes and even body comportment into serving as social identification codes. Of course, this is a fairly common phenomenon in the general culture, and in many social situations subjecting oneself to coded parole behaviour can be an innocuous way of enhancing a specific social experience such as, say watching a sports match, where the subjection to the paroles associated with a favoured team, for instance by dressing in its colours, creates a shared experience that might enhance the enjoyment.

However, when the engendered behaviour are the result of doxical misrecognitions that have been inserted into economic and political fields, the social reactions created are politically purposive and therefore of a quite different nature. As a misrecognition solidify within a social group and is carried forward by identifying paroles, the shared experience, which for instance might be experienced during political rallies where the misrecognition is the basis for the group's coherence, will create a psychological feedback loop that will tend to further solidify the misrecognition. The feedback loop is a function of the fact that the misrecognition now also is tied to an emotional experience (the uplift of the rally) that is sought repeated, but which only can exist—and thus only be repeated—by continuing to embrace the socio-political views implicit in the misrecognition.

It is important to discern the fundamental difference between participation in social discourse based on the open exchange of arguments, which is empowering and therefore can be part of expansive and self-actualizing experiences; and activity participation, which is based on doxical beliefs and misrecognitions. When an experience is tied to a misrecognition, and only can arise through that portal, preservation of the misrecognition creates a crucial psychological defensive barrier around the given form of social participation. Therefore, all encounters in the social fields that might put the misrecognition under threat are liable to be met with rejection, and quite likely even with aggression, since the agent's verification of his or hers own identity now is closely tied to the misrecognition. In other words, social participation that predominantly is based on doxical beliefs and misrecognitions will not be empowering, but on the contrary, de-powering, shutting down the ability to absorb new facts and freely engage in the discourses of civil society with differently opinionated and minded individuals.

### The Memetic Misrecognition of Freedom

A case in point of a social concept, which has been twisted into a doxical misrecognition serving as a protective barrier around the exploitation institutionalized by neoliberal capitalism, is the concept of freedom. Freedom has taken on a role as a key meme in the neoliberal narratives, where it constantly is repeated, in all possible contexts.

In the history of our present culture, the notion of 'freedom' has played an

important role in the political transformation from the feudal autocracies to the modern democracies (as a political system with explicit characteristics). The neoliberal narratives have utilized this historical heritage to insert freedom as a meme into the public discourse, where it is elevated to the status of a political arbiter with an absolute and non-contestable content. Building upon this twist—freedom's elevation to an absolute status—it is used as an argument that can stand on its own and no longer requires supporting arguments when used as justification for a given policy or a political position. Or, which rather often is the case; the freedom meme is employed by the extreme right as justification for opposition to sensible public policies that are described as interfering with the citizen's 'freedom' to choose.

Most ominously, the elevation of freedom to an uncontested absolute was also implied in the United States Supreme Court's 5-4 decision in the *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission* case (January 21, 2010). This decision, with a gigantic leap in the realm of human logic, held that since corporations are groups of individuals (according to the much earlier adjudicated 'corporate personhood' principle), the corporate form must receive the same free speech privileges as individual citizens. Bringing home this verdict carried by the Court's ultra-conservative majority, it was further ruled that independent expenditures are a form of speech, and limiting a corporations' ability to spend money (for instance, in support of certain political parties, etc.) would therefore impermissibly limit their abilities to speak! In this way, the Supreme Court held forth the more than 200 years old First Amendment and its freedom concept, originally aiming at preserving the freedom of the colonial elite from oppression of colonial overlords (and therefore, the freedom championed was in fact of a very limited scope), to argue against setting any restrictions on modern-day corporations (and their CEOs, owners, etc.) to use corporate money to influence and corrupt the political system.<sup>3</sup>

As the inculcations of the narratives have solidified within large social groups, the freedom meme has imbued freedom with an argumentative power that can be utilized by invoking it in political debates as a substitute for factual arguments. In particular, the invocation is, within the neoliberal context, used to legitimize the imposed economic system of laissez-faire capitalism where all regulations and countervailing forces—such as labour laws and unions—that might impose countervailing restraints on the corporations are attacked on the premise that they impair freedom. The concept of freedom is thereby twisted into a signifier that demands acceptance of the exploitation and the unequal incomes distribution that neoliberal laissez-faire capitalism gives rise to.

Accordingly, narratives centred on the freedom meme have created a protective cordon of misrecognitions around an economic system that in its essence is highly contestable—during the neoliberal period the inherent tendency of capitalism to disproportionately favour a numerical small social class of the very richest at the expense of the rest of the population has sharply intensified (see for instance fig. 7-2).

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<sup>3</sup> Viz. "Can 46 rich dudes buy an election?" By Charles Riley, CNN Money March 26, 2012. <http://money.cnn.com/2012/03/26/news/economy/super-pac-donors/index.htm>

But by turning focus away from the economic results of excessive freedom for the corporations—the fact that the corporations have been able to operate in a marketplace with few regulations to protect workers and consumers—the economic system that produces these results is less and less contested in the fields of practical politics. Opposition to the contestable economic outcomes has become opposition to freedom as an idealized concept, causing even mild centre-left policies that attempt to slightly rebalance the economic structures to be fiercely attacked on that notion.

When protective narratives based on doxical but unrecognized misrecognitions become dominant social discourse, and their uncritical acceptance prevalent and expected, they turn into vehicles for symbolic oppression. In the social fields where the narratives have come to dominate, opposition and non-acceptance of the principles they suggest will be censured and lead to stigmatization in the social arenas where the narratives hold sway.

Naturally, the freedom meme does not stand alone but connects to other memes carried forward by the neoliberal concepts, for example the right (or freedom) to enjoy the fruits of one's success, even when the 'success' is, say success in financial derivatives speculation that destabilizes the general economy, or earning obscene incomes from the jobs stripping practices of equity funds; types of activities whose costs in the form of economic and social externalities extract heavy levies on the real economy. But by imbibing the freedom meme, large population groups have become inoculated against realizing how such economic activities, which have surged to new heights recently, constrain their own economic freedoms by reducing the opportunities left open to them.

It should be emphasized that although dominant narratives and their enabling memes often emerge as the result of conscious construction—as for instance the work of the successful U.S. Republican pollster and meme creator, Frank Luntz, is an example of—that is not always the case. Meme constructs can also arise from common psychological traits that subconsciously command people to search for legitimizing rationales for their pursuit of selfish goals, in particular when the pursuit are expected to conflict with the interests of other social participants or common public goals; in other words, when it is anticipated (again, perhaps subconsciously) that the pursuit of self-maximizing goals will be at the cost of reducing opportunities of others, and therefore likely to expose the self-maximizer to criticism and animosity. In such cases, people will tend to develop rationales, which convert into memes when communicated to others and subsequently might acquire force as part of the falsity of a current narrative. By propagating the misrecognitions that the self-constructed memes convey, the process can be seen as attempts at reducing the cognitive dissonances that self-maximizing behaviour is likely to lead to.<sup>4</sup>

In the social macro fields, the confluence between the strengthening neoliberal

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<sup>4</sup> The concept of cognitive dissonance was coined by Leon Festinger in the 1956 book “When Prophecy Fails”. Its corollary, cognitive dissonance reduction hypothesis, suggests that we are motivated to reduce dissonance by adjusting our beliefs to be in line with our actions.

narratives, dominant class interests, and rationales for self-maximizing social participation have aroused social macro phenomena of cumulative cycles: self-reinforcing cycles of symbolic violence fuelled by shared misrecognitions that deepens as the cycle feeds on itself. Bruce Caron, cited above, continues: “We can further locate symbolic violence as those forms ... which, through their misrecognition, are applied by the subject to the subject.” In other words, those who have embraced a misrecognition will often be very active in its further propagation, without being aware of the ultimately self-defeating nature of their submission to the symbolic violence it indicates; in the current case, the neoliberal goal of harnessing society to the income and wealth maximization strategies employed by a small economic elite.

A main function of the neoliberal narratives can thus be seen as providing memetic inculcations of rationales for pursuing selfish goals in the social fields. The advantage gained is the propagation of anarchistic social states where everyone is out for their own self-interests, which is to the obvious advantage of those already holding entrenched power positions. The anarchistic tendencies thus lubricate the current economic elite’s goals of continuous and unimpeded accumulation.

In turn, people with a habitus that incline them to self-maximize and socially free-ride will be attracted to the false rationales suggested by the narratives and eventually adopt them, even when the actual economic outcomes that the system accords to them, in fact place them in the oppressed class. Of course, the rationalizations can often in the first place exist as social group or class dependent doxa, which are inherited as part of specific social field position, perhaps established as the result of class relations inscribed in the layers of their habitus already during childhood.

Turning to epistemological fundamentals, the narrative’s elevation of freedom to an absolute status ignores the bifurcated structure of all social relationships. The bifurcation of social concepts means that an interpretation taken to extremes will tend to contain its own negation. The British philosopher, Isaiah Berlin, pointed this out in with regard to the concept of freedom:

“Advocacy of non-interference (like 'social Darwinism') was, of course, used to support politically and socially destructive policies which armed the strong, the brutal, and the unscrupulous against the humane and the weak, the able and ruthless against the less gifted and the less fortunate. Freedom for the wolves has often meant death to the sheep.”<sup>5</sup>

Thus, due to the current strength of the freedom meme in the North American societies, the top incomes percentiles, who are the primary beneficiaries of the corporations largely unchecked abilities to earn monopolistic profits, are placed in the happy situation that the majority of ordinary incomes earners—the sheep in the economic arenas—in their confusion of political freedom with unchecked economic freedom inadvertently are led to support the institutional arrangements in the economy whereby the top incomes percentiles—the wolves in the economic arenas—due to their control of the corporate hierarchies and strong influence on executed politics are

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<sup>5</sup> Isaiah Berlin: Introduction to “Four Essays on Liberty”, 1969

able to continue to raise the share of the total social output that they can appropriate for their exclusive use.

## The Hidden Valuations

In the context of protective narratives, the current market fundamentalist interpretation of economics—embodied in theories such as rational expectation and efficient market hypothesis—have become important auxiliaries for the narratives of the neoliberal political economy. Insofar that market fundamentalist economics has the assumption of the optimizing power of free and unregulated markets at its centre, it dovetails with the neoliberal meta-narrative of freedom always being an unquestioned and absolute social good.

Besides freedom, other concepts have also migrated into the neoliberal narratives as enabling memes, including the interpretation of rationality as exhibiting social attitudes that aim at maximizing self-interests, a concept at the core of the rational choice theorem.

One of the consequences of the rationality assumption in modern economics is its extension to the position of the economist, who qua his or hers rational mind is held to be an unbiased, objective social analyzer, a notion which imbues the economist with strong symbolic status power.

This view of the unbiased, rational economist permeates Milton Friedman's influential essay "The Methodology of Positive Economics", which opens with the following declaration:

"Positive economics is, or can be, an "objective" science, in precisely the same sense as any of the physical sciences. ... in principle [it is] independent of any particular ethical position or normative judgments."<sup>6</sup>

This purported methodological sibling to the physical sciences, we are told, are characterized by:

"Mathematics and formal logic come into their own in checking its consistency and completeness and exploring its implications. There is no place in the model for, and no function to be served by, vagueness, maybe's, or approximations."<sup>7</sup>

By this declaration, Friedman attempts to remove economics from the logic of common sense and arguments that govern social relations in the real world where acts driven by altruism, non-maximizing attitudes held by ecologically conscious people are also to be found, and even habitual inconsistencies in the economic fields are perfectly common occurrences. Instead, by invoking his professional position he assumes a symbolic violent status power of speaking for a purported higher, formal logic. By this sleight of hand, he moves the fields of economics into a realm where rationality is interpreted as exhibiting self-maximizing attitudes; an assumed proven position, and

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<sup>6</sup> Milton Friedman "Essays in Positive Economics", (1953).

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

therefore removing any need for it to be further discussed.

In contrast to Friedman's claim of positivist and objective science, another Nobel laureate, Swedish economist Gunnar Myrdal, held entirely opposite views:

"There is no way of studying social reality other than from the viewpoint of human ideals. A 'disinterested social science' has never existed and, for logical reasons, cannot exist. The value connotation of our main concepts represents our interest in a matter, gives direction to our thoughts and significance to our inferences. It poses the questions without which there are no answers."<sup>8</sup>

And: "Full objectivity, however, is an ideal toward which we are constantly striving, but which we can never reach. The social scientist, too, is part of the culture in which he lives, and he never succeeds in freeing himself entirely from dependence on the dominant preconceptions and biases of his environment."<sup>9</sup>

To counter this reality, there is only one remedy:

"The [personally held] valuations [from which biases spring] will, when driven underground, hinder observation and inference from becoming truly objective. This can be avoided only by making the valuations explicit. There is no other device for excluding biases in the social sciences than to face the valuations and to introduce them as explicitly stated, specific, and sufficiently concretized, value premises."<sup>10</sup>

Current neoclassical economics has mainly adopted Friedman's positivism and rule by formal, but unrealistic, logic. In the process, it is ignoring Myrdal's skepticism of that approach. The problem is that the economists, as they proceed from unrecognized biases in the valuations, work under the self-illusions of being fully objective social scientists. This introduces biases into the public discourse hidden under the veneer of professional competence, which among the unsuspecting public laymen add weight to their statements. Due to the illusions, Myrdal's declaration—that valuations must be explicitly stated—is considered unnecessary by economists who believe to be engaged in positive science and their own work, per definition, espousing value free, unbiased science.

Friedman's work is however a typical example of a work in which, under the veneer of professional competence, extensive misrecognitions are attempted unloaded upon the readers. In his scholarly work on positive economics and monetarism, the fallacious valuations are hidden behind esoteric language, but they come into plain view in his two books of populist economics, "Capitalism and Freedom" and "Free to Choose".<sup>11</sup> These books gained a large audience in the U. S. and played a considerable role in fomenting the rise of neoliberalism. In particular, they created large doses of fodder for supporting narratives adopted by the early neoliberal politicians, such as Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher.

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<sup>8</sup> Gunnar Myrdal: "An International Economy, Problems and Prospects." Appendix pp. 336-340. (1956)

<sup>9</sup> Gunnar Myrdal: "An American Dilemma" (1944). Appendix 2. "A Methodological Note on Facts and Valuations in Social Science". p.1035.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. p. 1043

<sup>11</sup> "Capitalism and Freedom" (1962) and "Free to Choose" (1980), the latter also converted into a popular TV serial.



Friedman's books overflow with a mixture of simplistic political and economic philosophy that often—surprisingly considering his fame and professional status—borders on sheer platitudes that only the truly naïve or someone already totally submerged into the market fundamentalist doxa can fail to take note of. Take for example the following:

"The consumer is protected from coercion by the seller because of the presence of other sellers with whom he can deal. The seller is protected from the consumer because of other consumers to whom he can sell. The employee is protected from coercion by the employer because of other employers for whom he can work, and so on. And the market does this impersonally and without centralized authority."<sup>12</sup>

Friedman's main argument, which is extended to all types of economic activities, is thus that in a capitalist market economy we are all free and in the happy situation that we need only deal with those who offer us deals that we are satisfied with. Whenever we don't like an offer, in a free market economy we can always walk away and deal with other agents in a marketplace overflowing with readily available substitutions.

To preserve this postulated freedom—and thereby the efficiency of the unregulated market economy—the only viable option is really to implement laissez-faire capitalism with a minimalist government, a point that Friedman repeats over and over throughout his works. His approach will not only grow the economy at a maximum, but also, equally important he claims, preserve our precious freedoms by keeping potentially oppressive governments at bay.

The implicit argument is thus that whenever an exchange is made, the very fact that none of the contracting parties exercised their right to walk away, by itself is a proof that the exchanges were voluntary choices of utility (or money value) maximizing options.

Since the perfect laissez-faire market is claimed to always have a price at which all products and factors are exchangeable, market failures—for example unemployment—are in the spirit of Friedman considered to always be voluntary. As Robert Lucas, another influential neoconservative economist (awarded the Nobel prize for his elaboration of the nonsensical rational expectation hypothesis) puts it:

"To explain why people allocate time to a particular activity - like unemployment - we need to know why they prefer it to all other available activities."<sup>13</sup>

The implication is that all the millions of unemployed workers found in our economies must have walked away from reasonable offers, put forward according to the prevalent market's wage-prices for the marginal labour productivity they have to offer.

According to this view, when unemployment in the U.S. shot up from around 5 percent in the spring of 2008 to over 10 percent in the fall of 2009, fully five percent<sup>14</sup> (6-7 million workers) of the American workforce were supposedly gripped by a sudden

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<sup>12</sup> "Capitalism and Freedom" p. 14.

<sup>13</sup> Robert Lucas: Models of Business Cycles (1987) p.54

<sup>14</sup> In April 2008 unemployment was 4.9%, by Oct. 2009 it had risen to 10.1%. After bls.gov. Since this number doesn't take into account the rise in discouraged workers that left the workforce during this period, the total rise in unemployment is even higher.

urge to allocate more time to 'that particular activity' of not working. In large numbers they left jobs or rejected reasonable offers in order to be able to choose some other available opportunities, perhaps a preference for sitting in front of the TV or the gamebox—well, until the bank forecloses the unpaid mortgages, repossesses the flat screen TV, and throw them out of the house.

The nonsense lays itself bare. Nevertheless, economists who put such claims forward are readily, as indicated above, held in the highest esteem at the top of the profession where Nobel prizes are handed out.

## Two Concepts of Voluntariness

It seems fairly obvious that many neoliberal economists have only vague ideas about epistemological and philosophical principles framing the debates in other sciences. An example of an epistemological discourse with direct implications for economics is Isaiah Berlin's notion of a bifurcation of freedom.<sup>15</sup> In the seminal essay "Two Concepts of Liberty",<sup>16</sup> he developed the notion that liberty bifurcates into a positive notion: freedom to; and a negative aspect: freedom from. 'Freedom to' is the freedom to do what one wants to do, to have access to open and unconstrained social spaces in which to self-actualize and freely engage in social encounters and critical discourses. 'Freedom from' is freedom from social structures and relationships that might constrain positive freedoms, constraints that can be imposed by everything from the oppression of authoritarian regimes to senseless bureaucracies, but also includes the intrusion of commercial messages and economic aggression into all corners of private and social spaces.

However, Berlin points out that from the bifurcation principle follows that absolute negative freedom—which with regards to economic activities is the absolute freedom from any regulative structures—will lead to anarchistic social structures where freedom becomes freedom for the strong to exploit the weak. When the restraints on negative freedoms are fully removed from the economic arenas, creating an economy without any regulations or legal restraints, the result is that the social function of freedom turns around and becomes its own negation.

That means that instead of conditions where individual participation in economic activities promises a return of earning fair incomes that can support and enhance lifestyles endowed with positive freedoms, opportunities for engaging in such lifestyles on the contrary shrink and are replaced with 'freedom' to live under economic exploitative conditions. On the macro level under anarchistic economic structures—as the ones we currently experience—the capitalist imperative to 'accumulate, accumulate'

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<sup>15</sup> See the quote on p.110

<sup>16</sup> Isaiah Berlin: Two Concepts of Liberty (1958). For a discussion of Berlin's concept of Positive and Negative Liberty see also Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy at <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/liberty-positive-negative/>

take over and intrude upon all corners of social life with its commercial products and activities, which in their aggregate social impacts severely reduce the sum of livable public spaces left open for creative acts and critical discourses.

The concept of 'voluntariness' as used in economics, for instance as exemplified in Friedman's quote above, can be seen to contain a similar bifurcation into positive and negative aspect; a possibility that Friedman is oblivious to. In the case of the bifurcation of voluntariness, positive voluntariness is acting because one has a desire to do something, driven by a belief that it will enhance not only one's utility in an economic sense, but also one's life quality in a self-actualizing sense. Negative voluntariness is what one does, not because of a fear of punishment (which everyone agree upon would be involuntary acts), but because one believes that under the given circumstances the chosen act is that which reaches some minimal goals, under consideration of the social cost-benefit relations that choosing other opportunities would entail.

Negative voluntariness is often caused by exposure to symbolic violence, such as for instance in the workplace when a worker don't do something or refrain from speaking out because he or she knows that it will release a dose of bullying behaviour by superiors or from co-workers known to be oppressive and to use symbolic violence as mechanisms of domination in their network interactions.

In the more direct case of an employment bargain, if Friedman's workers, in the above quoted passage from "Capitalism and Freedom", are not satisfied with the wage offer put forward in the human resources office of a large corporation, they must weigh the opportunity cost of saying no and walking out of the door. In particular, they must weigh the implication of high unemployment rates—the general case in the advanced economies in recent decades (the low marks between 4 to 5 percent reached in the U.S. under Clinton and Bush is still too high seen from the view of a fair economy). They must also take into account the fact that good jobs, for instance in manufacturing, in large numbers have been exported to low-cost countries, leaving most open jobs to be found in minimum wage paying service sectors. Lastly, they must consider the dilemma created by the literally millions of illegal immigrants from Mexico and beyond that have been flooding across the Rio Grande and into the U.S., where they have been welcomed by the neoliberal establishment as wage and union busters at the bottom of the labour market.

The sum of all of these defining conditions of the neoliberal labour market makes it risky to say no to a low-ball corporate job offer, since not only might another job offer not be easy to find in an economy with chronic unemployment, but a good chance is that it, if found, could offer a yet lower wage. Thus, saying 'no' to a corporation's low-ball job offer and walk away involves risky alternatives for a worker.

Therefore, when a worker after considering the alternatives finds him- or herself compelled to accept a low-ball job offer, it will be a choice that is far from the worker's aspirations. However, not walking away will fulfil the minimal goal of having a job and an income in face of the far worse possibility of being unemployed in a depressed job market, with no income at all (or only inadequate unemployment assistance that quickly transforms into even less adequate social security). In the case of a union in a bargaining

situation, 'voluntarily' accepting wage and benefit cuts for its members is set against the far worse scenarios that sends all the jobs to China, or without further ado fire everybody and replace them with non-unionized wage busters (which neoliberal changes to labour laws have made freely possible in a rising number of jurisdictions).

In economics, negative voluntariness is therefore a question of facing circumstances where the structuring forces of the field disadvantage a class of agents by leaving them fewer open opportunities than the agents, or agency representatives, on the opposing side of normal market exchanges (including wage bargains). The labour market in the current economies is such a case, being structured by a number of asymmetric tendencies inherent in the industrial enterprise system that have intensified in the neoliberal economy; asymmetries that favour the few—the corporations—and disfavour the many—workers and average consumers.

Naturally, on the other side of labour markets—the demand coming from the firms—this has meant increasingly favourable conditions for raising the effective profit rate. The intensification process includes loosening, or in many cases even abolishing, regulations protecting labour contracts and workplace safety conditions; purportedly in the name of 'enhancing' productivity and competitiveness. The trouble for labour is, of course, that in the increasingly unregulated market, productivity gains, whenever they have occurred and added to the aggregate surplus, the corporations have appropriated almost all gains and subsequently exclusively distributed it through the various channels to the beneficiaries of the corporate ownership-control system.

While the demand elasticity for labour thus has turned more elastic for firms in response to the structural changes favouring the firms, the reverse elasticity of the labour supply coming from workers has moved in a different direction. This is, among other things, caused by changes connected to the social process that during the post-war period—when gains from productivity were still more equitably shared—elevated a large segment of the working class to the middle class, moving them into the new subdivisions that were springing up in the hastily growing, car-accessed-only suburban sprawl. Chained to home mortgages, car payments, and aspirations of sending the kids to college this raised the economic costs and social disruptions connected with unemployment. The changes reduced the mobility of the workforce by creating social resistance to, for instance, during downturns moving to other cities where more job prospects might be found. Taken together, these factors enhanced the social imperatives for workers to avoid unemployment at all costs; in other words, the changes were part of processes that moved labour's supply curve toward a more inelastic profile.

Summing up, a problem plaguing the neoclassical analysis of modern capitalism with imperfect markets is that it doesn't recognize that 'voluntariness' and 'freedom' cannot be reduced to singular concepts, which then can function as arbiters of the institutional 'correctness' of the various structural elements of a political economy. Thus, when Lucas, in the above statement, considers all unemployment to be voluntary, it is a view that is blind to the existence of negative voluntariness in imperfect markets, imperfections that occur as a function of structures of monopolistic competition (technically speaking, called monopsonistic competition in labour and other buyers

markets), and the unequal distribution of effective opportunities under relations defined by asymmetric market structures. In contrast to Lucas naïve (perhaps willfully so and therefore memetic) assumption of perfect, and consequently fair, distributions of supply-demand forces, real world power relations create asymmetric market conditions that constrain the opportunities facing weaker classes of economic agents, typically with strong price-setting effects.

### Practice of Economics as Symbolic Violence

The market fundamentalist theories are besides resting on the customary general neoclassical assumptions emphasizing A) that deviations from an expected mean are normally distributed, which ensures that a disequilibrium will return to equilibrium and steady states sooner rather than later; B) that economic events, despite themselves being a class of social events, can be considered taking place in an inert social dimension that have no traces of socio-cultural path histories.

The sum of these two fallacies removes the discourse from the possibility that economic relationships in a systemic way can be asymmetrically structured by power positions and other social relations outside of the narrowly considered economic spaces. If asymmetries anyway are observed, there is in the market fundamentalist view no need to panic, because the theory promises us that they cannot have any permanence.

When such fundamental fallacies are at the basis for the explanations that are expounded in teachings and public statements coming from the economists they become specimens of symbolic violence by hiding the exploitative forces inherent in modern capitalism behind inoperative theories elevated to dogma. Seen from this perspective, the market fundamentalist bias dominating current discourses of economics has become an important element of the false rationales defending the rising inequalities.

An example of how neoclassical economists deploy the notions of market fundamentalist rationales when faced with real world problems can be gleaned from reactions to a case of solidarity protests organized by Harvard students in 2001 against the rock-bottom wages the university paid its janitorial staff.

Triggered by the student protests, a study over pay strategies in a sample of 195 universities and colleges (out of the nations 4,000) was conducted. This revealed that Harvard was not alone in paying rock-bottom wages to its custodial staffs; among the sampled universities, 12 even paid wages that amounted to incomes below the official poverty level. More generally, it was also found that it was common to outsource the janitorial services to private firms that specialize in providing these services at low costs. This enables the university administrators to wash their hands and pretend that they have no influence over the wages that the contracting firms pay, since the wages they offer must be dictated by those pesky, but impartial, market forces that all businesses must obey.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> “How Much Should Colleges Pay Their Janitors? Student protests force administrators to

Faced with ongoing protests, which had escalated into a sit-in at the university's administrative offices, the university asked several leading social scientists for advice on how to deal with the protest, among them Gregory Mankiw, an economist at the university's Department of Economics, who later was to serve as Chairman of the President's Council of Economic Advisors under Bush. Today Mankiw, who is also author of one of the most widely used introductory economics textbooks, is back at Harvard, teaching its flagship introductory economics course in an auditorium with up towards 700 students in attendance.<sup>18</sup> He is thus one of the most influential economists in the United States, firmly planted at the pinnacle of the profession, and an economist whose words are assigned the highest level of competence within the business and political establishments.<sup>19</sup>

Mankiw, a staunch believer in the neoclassical competitive equilibrium, was not in doubt about how the university ought to deal with the protest. Throwing the full weight of his professional competence into the answer, he proclaimed:

"Like most of the prices in our economy, wages move to balance supply and demand. A high minimum wage set by fiat, either through legislation or student pressure, prevents this natural adjustment and hurts some of the people it is designed to help. It is a timeless economic lesson that when the price of something goes up, buyers usually buy less of it. If Harvard has to pay its unskilled workers a higher wage, it will hire fewer of them. Some workers earn more, but others end up unemployed."

And: "Living-wage advocates say that Harvard with its huge endowment can afford to pay higher wages. That's true, but it misses the point. Like all employers, Harvard faces trade-offs. Should extra money be spent hiring more professors to reduce class sizes, or should it be spent hiring more janitors to vacuum classrooms more often? It's a judgment call. If the cost of unskilled labor rises, Harvard faces a new set of trade-offs. Over time, it will respond by hiring fewer of those workers."<sup>20</sup>

The view expounded by Mankiw is a good example of how complex economic functions, such as the wage bargain, is interpreted in the market fundamentalist universe and turned into symbolic violence by imbuing the biased interpretations with the pretence of being 'timeless scientific statements'. This cowers the uninitiated layman into accepting the views out of fear of looking dumb by not understanding the eminent scientific logic enunciated by economists with apparently impeccable credentials. When the biased logic then becomes accepted by a majority of the involved parties (even often including those who are disfavoured by the prevailing power structures but nevertheless are overpowered by the weight of the symbolic violence), the given debate is turned around and becomes governed by false premises, which in line with the market

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consider issues of social justice and practicality." By Martin van der Werf, The Chronicle of Higher Education, August 3, 2001.

[http://www.hcs.harvard.edu/~pslm/livingwage/08\\_03\\_che.html](http://www.hcs.harvard.edu/~pslm/livingwage/08_03_che.html)

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.thecrimson.harvard.edu/you-tube-video/2011/11/6/economics-10-walkout-mankiw/>

<sup>19</sup> In the summer of 2012, Mankiw appeared on a list of economic advisers to the Republican presidential candidate, Mitt Romney.

<sup>20</sup> "Ways and Means: Harvard's Wage Debate." Harvard Magazine November-December 2001.

fundamentalist interpretations are based on the assumption that the debated economic relations are impervious to social power relations that might influence the outcomes.

In the case of the wage bargain, the key operative pretence inserted by the market fundamentalist logic is thus that the wage bargain is playing out in a steady state universe clinically free of interfering power positions residing in the social dimension surrounding it. In line with this pretence, all labour conditions are analyzed as disconnected from the realities of current social and political conditions. The only structuring forces that are found in this world is the neoclassical price mechanism which imparts the wage bargain (as well as all other market exchanges) with the character of a mechanical and impartial seesaw: if one presses it down at one end, up springs the other with a momentum that is a direct, and only (and therefore calculable), effect of the price-quantity relation expressed by the pressing force of the price offer.

This simplistic view of the economy might be an admissible approximation for some simple markets, such as the markets for ice cream and pizzas at the entrances to college campuses, the type of examples that abound in the textbooks that economists in the Mankiw mould write. Unfortunately for the understanding of the economy that the teaching of market fundamentalist biased economics imparts to the students, when they are taught that such examples are models of the market that governs the general economy, the correlation from the simple to the complex is made without any case of why it should be so.

It sounds plausible that social relations inserting market power into exchange events will play little role in simple markets structures such as those effectuating the mentioned sale of pizzas on college campuses. Quite obviously, verifying that has little explanatory power for the market events taking place inside of, say a Walmart store. In Walmart's case, the natural tendencies of modern markets to develop marketing supported monopolistic competition are supercharged by the economic and political power that accrue to the world's largest company in consumer retailing.

To return to the labour market for janitorial services on universities, a critical real-world power determinant that decides how the structuring forces in this specific sub-market—the lowest rung in the universities' jobs hierarchy—frame the wage bargain is that many job-seekers are new immigrants and in some cases even illegal immigrants. Most possess low social skills, certainly in relation to their current socio-economic setting, a problem that often is compounded by language barriers. Consequently, they have few job opportunities in the general labour market. When low job skills and language barriers puts limits to the realistic job opportunities in a market with chronic unemployment, this group of job-seekers is, as a practical matter, compelled to accept whatever jobs, at whatever pay, they can get.

This means that in addition to the general asymmetric competitive conditions, the sub-market for janitorial services is further asymmetrically power-structured by the special conditions of containing a large number of job-seekers with no realistic bargaining positions whatsoever when facing an employer.

It should be noted that Harvard since has adopted the living wage principle advocated by the students. While this still is quite low wages, and Harvard thus remains

within the general structures of U.S. capitalism where large pay differences are standard, it at least has departed from the worst neoliberal excesses.

However, in order to take full advantage of the neoliberal economy's favourable structures for labour buyers, the labour buying firms or organizations must understand, and be willing to exploit, the given socio-economic condition. University administrators, who prefer to see themselves as cultured gentlemen, seldom have the skills nor, perhaps, the ruthlessness needed to exploit the prevalent market conditions, which is why they often prefer to remove themselves one step from the actual labour buying process by letting contractors take care of this aspect of running a university.

Thus, the universities often out-contract janitorial services to firms that specialize in supplying them, firms that through management specialization in ruthless bargaining obtain abilities to fully exploit this sub-market's special conditions. Facing job-seekers with no bargaining power, it enables such specialized labour buying firms to create positions close to full monopsony,<sup>21</sup> in other words, a position where they can maximize the profit equation to its fullest extent by offering wages close to the subsistence minimum; well-knowing that this sub-market's conditions guarantee that they still will find workers who are willing to accept the offers. In most cases, they will keep the lions part of the maximized profits, but the level of exploitation they can attain guarantees that they still can offer the services to the universities at prices which the university administrators seldom would be able to beat on their own.

When it is contended, as implicit in Mankiw's statement, that the difference between what Harvard is willing to pay their professors and what they are willing to pay their janitors are simple consequences of supply and demand forces in the markets that universities face, it is correct insofar that, indeed, supply and demand forces are at work—as they are in all markets. However, the market fundamentalist logic, with its attempt to portray markets as devoid of social dimensions and positions of market power, omits that supply and demand forces always are structured by the totality of the surrounding socio-political relations with whatever power charges and asymmetric relationships they carry.

In current labour markets, differences in opportunities for substitution define effective market power. For instance, Walmart has almost endless opportunities for substitution, while the job-seeking worker knocking on the door of one of its human resources offices realistically only will have few, if any.

On top of market power springing from the industrial economy's asymmetric structures, large corporations are often able to add specific socio-political power relations to their general market positions, for instance by lobbying activities or by donating to political campaigns. Such relations will in the real world lie on top of the general monopolistic competitive conditions as added power charges. Due to such

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<sup>21</sup> 'Monopsony' is, as mentioned, the mirror of monopoly in factors markets. That is cases where there are only one buyer facing many suppliers. In practice, as in the monopolistic consumers' market, pure monopsony is rare, probably close to non-existing. However, in labour markets the general condition is monopsonistic competition, which means that buyers in the general case have market power over the suppliers, the workers offering their wage-labour.



relationships, Walmart can for instance normally count on politicians to go along with its union-avoidance policies, or to craft local planning that is friendly to its goals of expansion when these clash with local community interests of preserving jobs in less exploitative modalities.

Differences in the socially determined positions of specific power relations will thus cause labour relations to work quite differently for janitors and for, say professors, two social groups possessing widely divergent social and economic positions, which in case of professors will include considerable social prestige (a symbolic power relation) and even sometimes (as in the case of Mankiw) ability to wield direct political influence by drawing on previous positions in high-charged fields of executive political power.

The main question is therefore not what the immediate reaction will be if wages are raised to living wages; it is perhaps plausible that in the short run some of the reactions which Mankiw predicts indeed will happen with adverse consequences for part of the current workforce of janitors. However, paying living wages will also have positive, compensating consequences for Harvard, some becoming manifest even in the short run. It will enhance the workers' job satisfaction and, consequently, lead to higher productivity and less turnover.

The main point is, however, that the story doesn't stop there.

### Dynamics of Structuring Forces

The main story of the wage bargain, which is totally missed in Mankiw's world (and in the universe of market fundamentalism in general), is the consequences that different approaches will have on the dynamics of the forward structuring forces that exist in a given social dimension; consequences that will push to the existing loops of vicious or virtuous cycles in ways that either will accelerate or slow down the core forces that determine their directions.

Among the problems in which market fundamentalist economics are mired are therefore not only that it sees all economic events as supply-demand relations playing out in inert social dimensions, but also that it eviscerates the forward dynamic structuring effects that all social events contain. The reality of the socio-cultural world is that its events play out under conditions where there are no sharp borders between the different forces active in the social fields. Therefore, if one wants to isolate for instance a specific economic aspect of an event for analytical purposes, it must be understood that this can only deliver inexact results that in worst cases can be totally misleading by having missed important determinants that might be hidden in the complex structures of the given fields; determinants and therefore unobservable to the casual and, especially, to the biased observer; the latter often due to doxa suppression.

The lack of sharp borders between the different structuring force determinants includes influences stemming from the actuating individual's habitus impressed by a class or other given social group backgrounds. In reality, when Mankiw puts forward his 'timeless views' they are inevitably, as Myrdal pointed out, coloured by his private

purposes and include influences arising from the specific class relations that frame his socio-cultural position. As a highly paid professor with substantial extra incomes he is placed well within the top 1% of the incomes spectrum. This imbues him with strong, probably subconsciously deposited, incentives to engage in symbolic violence. This becomes manifest when he suppresses views critical of the neoliberal political economy in teachings or public statements by classifying them as conflicting with the per definition inviolable market fundamentalist logic.

Since, as indicated, perpetrators of symbolic violence in most cases are unconscious about the influence of narratives and other specimens of symbolic violence, which they themselves have absorbed during their formative years, the chains of symbolic violence are inscribed in the social fields, where they “comes from the subject and goes to the subject”, as Bruce Caron noted.<sup>22</sup> Thus, symbolic violence will often reflect that the consciousness of the subjects are not aware of how the framing of the beliefs that drive their social interactions have come about.

With an understanding of the aspect of social dynamics, Harvard could choose to compensate for the higher cost of paying its janitors living wages by other budgetary measures than reducing the number of janitors. They could, for instance, compensate by slowing down the growth in incomes for the high incomes groups, such as professors (Mankiw's horror) and even their own group of university administrators. This approach would require the university administrators to look not at ‘timeless’ trade-offs based on the fictitious existence of a socially inert supply-demand seesaw, but at real-life trade-offs arising among the broad interests of all groups involved in running the university, and even aspects affecting general societal conditions. This would include balancing some of the broad economic conflicts of interests that exist within the institutional structures of a university, and not just evaluating interests conflicts along established class divisions, hidden behind a pretence of following a ‘rational’ market logic.

The crux of the matter is that accepting the students’ demand of raising the wages of the janitors to living wage levels has, depending on how it is offset, the potential to create positive dynamics with trend-shifting effects. An obvious one is that the extra wage amount will have a higher multiplier effect by being injected into a social group with an almost 100% propensity to spend incomes, thus stimulating general demand more than if the same amount was spent on professors’ wages; that is to say, paid to an income group with a much lower propensity to spend marginally earned dollars, and—in a macro view—a conversely high propensity to invest marginally earned dollars in financial assets.

The notion of dynamic effects is based on a rejection of the neoclassical views of equilibrium and rational expectations, from which deviations, if they occur at all, are considered strictly normally distributed. The reality is that when administrator set janitor's wages, the eventual decision will impact ongoing social trends and can therefore not be understood within a framework that is limited to assume a quasi-static and power neutral supply-demand seesaw of price-quantity relations.

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<sup>22</sup> See p. 109.

The key notion is that if the university administrators chose to compensate for pay-rises by reducing the number of janitors, it will be a policy decision that is guided by interest considerations following the current neoliberal bias. It will therefore continue to push to the vicious cycles that are characteristic of the neoliberal economy, in particular the rising income inequalities; and, on the macro side, accelerating the economy's destabilizing liquidity overhang.

Moreover, when compensating for giving janitors higher wages by reducing their numbers unemployment will go up. This, in one of its marginal effects, will further depress wage setting in the general labour market, and ensure that the gain by some will be the loss of others. This is in line with the implications of Mankiw's statements, but it should be emphasized that this view only holds true insofar decisions follow the current bias.

If administrators when raising wages from the level of neoliberal exploitative wages to living wages on the contrary compensate by other means than reducing the numbers of janitors, the decision will depart from the current bias. One obvious alternative would be, as indicated, to hold back on the growth of wages and bonuses of the high incomes groups employed by the university (which, in the case of universities that are private institutions, would include reducing investors' dividends).

The ramifications of some of the alternatives will not stop with wage and consumption effects. In an economy with too much liquidity accumulated in private hands, the over-accumulation process is an important growth limiting condition that however only can be slowed down by halting the growth of high incomes and reducing existing accumulations. The latter could include drawing down endowment funds accumulated by universities and convert the drawn down part to higher wages for low-income groups employed by the universities. Choices in such directions would again break the logic of the market fundamentalist bias. In other words, there are decisions available within the current political economy that could create fuel to counter-trends to the main trust of the neoliberal economy; counter-trends, which if they were to spread, would restore some of the more equitable conditions that existed between the different economic groups in the pre-neoliberal version of capitalism.

Summing up, raising janitors' pay to living wage levels would create tangible macroeconomic benefits compared to the neoliberal wage bargain—the latter approach of using the asymmetrically power structured conditions of markets to, whenever possible, press wages down to rock bottom. Obviously, such approaches would continue the ongoing trend of exploitation, widening economic disparities, and destabilizing overaccumulation of asset inflationary liquidity (i.e. wealth held in liquid financial instruments).

This puts the above-mentioned dynamics of trends, and the shifts in power ratios between identifiable economic interests they lead to, into the centre of the economic analysis. When the dynamics of trends are considered, a number of questions ignored by the neoliberal narratives will come into focus: Why do current social structures cause supply and demand relations to assign stagnant poverty-level wages to income groups such as university janitors, and high and rising incomes to university professors and

administrators? Why have societal power relations caused the low wage segment of labour markets to fall so much behind in the period roughly starting in 1980? Why are the conditions in the U.S. labour market currently worse and incomes inequalities wider than in all other advanced economies, when differences in these measures were not so pronounced in the period prior to the ascendance of the neoliberal power constellations? Finally, what is the relation between the deteriorating conditions in labour markets and the rapid growth in liquid financial wealth, with the observed consequences of macroeconomic instability and corollary of slower real growth?

One answer is obviously to be found in the rising asymmetries in the labour markets that neoliberal policies have engendered. The sum of union busting, offshoring, illegal immigrants used as wage busters (and in some cases also legal immigrants and temporary workers), etc. have combined to sharply reduce the average bargaining position of labour, while, conversely, power-charged the bargaining positions of firms and other labour buying organizations. This includes not only universities, but also public bodies under the control of elected politicians who, instead of maintaining adequate levels of taxation, have pursued voter popular tax cutting policies, which they then in turn have paid for by availing themselves of the conditions in the neoliberal labour markets that also can be used to depress wages of public employees. Alternatively, they have paid for the tax cuts by shifting public services to the crop of private service companies whose main service is their specialization in exploiting the neoliberal market conditions.

The meaning of true economic analysis is not to identify a path to imaginary equilibrium positions, but to understand which social and economic forces have shaped the present, and how currently active forces are likely to define emerging trends. If we can identify such forces, we will also gain access to the key to how to shift conditions in directions that are economically and socially more desirable.

Seen from this angle, Friedman's positive economics and Mankiw's 'timeless lessons' are exposed as symbolically violent ingredients of a neoliberal political economy. The price mechanism of supply and demand seen in static isolation from its surrounding social dimension has no explanatory content. In a wider context, it is meaningless to just observe that in a specific situation, as a price went up, less was bought. Nevertheless, that is the 'timeless' focus of market fundamentalist economics, which keeps ignoring that already the Giffin's paradox<sup>23</sup> from the late nineteenth century showed that it is not possible to extend such observations to a general rule or a social 'law'. What must be explained are how rising or falling prices connect to ongoing dynamic trends, and which kind of forward momentum they potentially will impart to the existing social relations.

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<sup>23</sup> A Giffin good is an inferior, but also a necessary good consumed in considerable quantities. In such cases, Giffin claimed to have observed, that a price rise in the necessary good devoured so much extra income that consumption of higher quality but more expensive food was reduced, leading to higher consumption of the necessary good. The example given was that a rise in the price of bread forced poor people to eat less meat in order to be able to pay for the higher price of bread. But then they would also have to eat some more bread to substitute for the deselected meat. In this way, a rise in the price of bread did not reduce demand but in fact enhanced it at the margin.

If university administrators go along with Mankiw's views, they will remain agents of the forces that have led to the stagnation of lower and middle incomes groups, and conversely fuelled the rapid growth of the incomes of the top 1%, including their own. This, of course, is the core function of the neoliberal economic policies, which the intensive obfuscation inserted by the narratives attempts to hide. If, on the contrary, the university administrators accept the janitors demand as supported by the students' sit-in and raise pay to living wages, they will become agents of a countertrend that pushes towards a fairer economy and which will contain, at the margin, higher demand multipliers as well as less macroeconomic volatility, due to the fact that it also will reduce the volume of unspent incomes flowing into the asset inflationary cycles.

Price changes are not mechanical reactions, or expressions of choices devoid of non-economic determinants. Therefore, the focal point of any analysis must be to investigate which social forces, which positions of market power, etc. combine with the economic particulars to determine a given price-quantity relation. Moreover, we must strive to know whether the feedback loops that the economic events create are part of vicious or virtuous cycles, as Gunnar Myrdal framed the question. This, in the end, means that the economist (or others involved in producing analyses and statements in the fields of political economy) cannot free him- or herself from the realm of normative values, from staking out ethical positions.

### Economics 101 as Neoliberal Narrative

Introductory courses in economics are today commonly taken by many of the students that pass through today's universities. Thus, many that follow these courses do not plan to go on as economics majors, but just want to combine a credit with getting a basic understanding of how this important element of society works.

Such introductory courses are however more often than not taught according to the market fundamentalist bias of equilibrium markets that are disconnected from social influences and power relations. This means that the students unwittingly will absorb a false logic. The epistemologically unsound principles upon which market fundamentalist economics is erected (the presumed perfect conditions needed for the logical construct of equilibrium markets, etc.) among other things ignore that economic events always are elements of dynamically trending social structures. Moreover, as it is the case with all other social regressions, the distributions of economic events are not likely to be normally distributed, but rather fat-tailed in direction of prevailing biases.

In other words, the economic fields are progressing under influences from social conditions and power balances that always are in the process of shifting and therefore cannot be reduced to the 'steady state' of pure market forces progressing in a logical glass bubble. That means that the theories brought forward by the dominant market fundamentalist teaching effectively can be seen as reductionist exercises, playing to path-dependent memetic ensembles. Their main socio-political function is to lend credence to the narratives that in the political arenas legitimize the economic inequalities and

exploitative social relations of modern capitalism.

With the market fundamentalist bias in a dominant position in curricula in schools and universities, the alleged professional status-competence of the expounders of the theories turns the teaching into processes that impose symbolic violence upon the students, who however only in rare cases will have an independently acquired antidote of knowledge that can discern the factual bias that the education imparts upon them and disarm its doses of symbolic violence.

Those of the students who go on as majors and to post-graduate levels of study of economics will subsequently become so enmeshed in mastering the complex mathematics—the mastering of which increasingly are seen as a badge professional competence—that they are assured to totally lose all contact with the social complexities to which the observable economic events inevitably connect. Being unconscious prisoners of the inculcations of the neoliberal narratives, the contradictions between a mathematically constructed version of life in the market fundamentalist sign, and the socially embedded and power structured economic interactions that meet us in the real world, never surfaces to the level of producing critical questions and discourse.

Being oblivious to the imposition of the symbolic violence means that the students, when they leave the convocation hall with their final examination paper in the pocket, will carry with them a belief that they have been taught a version of economics that is objective, positive science—a sum of the best of all possible knowledge to be had about how economic life in our societies work. Their belief will be that their years studying economics have turned them into rational agents, who are in possession of a true understanding of how freedom and unregulated markets combine to reward the relentless self-maximizers with their oversized, but well deserved, shares of the economic output.

However, the reality is that what they have received—and will carry with them into their prospective careers—is an imprint of the world and its economic relationships that is built on the false logic of the market fundamentalist bias, which moreover have been expounded by teaching techniques that rely heavily upon formalism, including a predilection for econo-mathematics that rules out approaches based on critical thinking. It is a scholastic path that reduces the interpretations of the world to allegedly positivist statements that deem the highest order of social arrangements to be unregulated markets where the wolves are free to eat the sheep, and the sheep perfectly free to let themselves be eaten, to paraphrase Isaiah Berlin's metaphor.

Thus, modern economics buries the factual relationships between economic activities and political and social power in a false positivism. This includes the very potent power that arises from large economic accumulations, which turns even 'pure' economic activities into asymmetric relationships.

Due to the sheer numbers of the students who leave the universities and business schools with such an imprint of the market fundamentalist bias firmly planted into their doxa—the habitual beliefs they will have formed about the world—the aggregate level of symbolic violence imposed on society by academic economics has been a decisive factor in shaping the changing public perceptions about economic relationships. Upholding the

relentless market fundamentalist self-maximizer as the social hero has swung attitudes towards accepting the large and rising income-wealth inequalities as an unavoidable human condition, and caused seeing ecological negligence and indifference to social problems as being an economic virtue.

Stopping education that reinforces the market fundamentalist bias—with its destructive implications for the future—is thus of primary importance for restoring economics to the ranks of social sciences that are based on critical thinking; a restoration that in the process must toss all of the market fundamentalist memes out of the window.