

Sorting Out Superposed Circuits

I have twisted and turned regarding our tackling here the five pages of *For a New Political Economy* that begin with **19** and end with “primitive countries.”¹ Part of my twisting was to write a preliminary essay about starting out, but, LOL, it got out of hand, sort-of. Back to that in the next essay.

“Sorting Out” came to me then as the *sors*—Latin for *chance, fate*—of our effort, and there is the key twist that a lot—another chancy word—depends on your state as you teeter forward. Might you pause now and check whether you are “out of sorts”?² You need good humor, in every sense, to “come along with me”³ here. One of my LOLs about beginning this is that the first sentence of the text reminded me of the first sentence of Archimedes’ *On Floating Bodies*: a compact incomprehensible claim.⁴

So I pick our start from the **end** of my selected text: “In England basic wage rates did not begin to rise until 1870; that would suggest that previous basic expansions had been avoided successfully by diverting increased potential into increased excess export.”⁵

Does this make sense to you? Forget England and history, and take my advice given at the end of *Economics for Everyone*, chapter three, and see it as another way into this topic of chapter four. Remember Joey, the lady on the island who invents the plough?⁶

You may now go on to reflect on Joey’s daughter, as she stands on the shore one evening and sees a strange canoe approaching, and the idea bubbles from her creative imagination. “Wouldn’t it be nice to share our ploughs with these folks? But we would need something larger than a canoe ...”⁷

¹ *For A New a Political Economy*, 308–13, ending at line 13. Here I would suggest that following, or leaping, along with me be done first without paying attention to the footnotes. They add contexts in different ways, from simple referencing to extra nudgings, some quite way-out.

² Not in good “form”: but what form is good here and what can have you “out of sorts” in its regard. This is a topic central to our series effort: it spreads creatively into many deep channels about cultural disorientations and humanity’s immaturity. Think of the “form” of the crippled present slice of emergent probability. We’ll get back to it, or rather forward to it, later.

³ I am recalling Ashley Eriksson’s song from the Album (2018) “Adventure Time. Come Along with Me.” quoted at note 13 of [Æconomics 2](#). Notes 12 and 20 below reminds you of the relevance of that presentation to our struggle forward.

⁴ This presentation of Archimedes is the topic of my [Cantower 27](#), “Atoms in Motion,” section 2, “Plunging in with Archimedes” (pp. 5–10). My own favorite presentation of Archimedes begins with a coat-hanger with two equal bananas dangling from strings at its ends, and a glass of water: go figure. Think of our present problem as perhaps nicely tackled by a start with banana republics.

⁵ *For a New Political Economy*, 313.

⁶ *Economics for Everyone*, (Axial Publishing, 3rd edition, 2017), 4ff., 63, 68, 71.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 74.

There is a good distraction here that belongs ‘below’ in my off-course notes, but I decided that it was worth putting in the text: it relates to our distant hope. Joey’s daughter is not thinking, “Hell, I could make a few more bucks ...” She has inherited another attitude, an attitude you might muse over as both aboriginal and ‘anthropositivocene.’⁸ Then you can muse over us being in an in-between stage of humanity’s story where we are quite off-course. Yesterday I came across a quotation that would help that musing, covering all three stages:

The spontaneous consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group; this consent is ‘historically’ caused by the prestige (and consequent confidence) which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production.⁹

I won’t distract us further by going into the character of prestige in the zones of time and space in history, and its genetic restructuring, but, e.g., it keeps us on track motivationally to recall that wage rates of the 1970s in the U.S.A. echo, but forward in time, the English 1870 situation: the real wages have not gone up: the same sick prestige is at work.

Now back we go on track. We seek to understand the “machinery”¹⁰ of the mess, not the kindliness that works either simply concomitantly or towards its occasional displacement.¹¹ So, e.g., can you envisage how a flawed enthusiasm for exporting ploughs could mess up an economy? Always remember that we are bent on—or rather I am bending you on, onwards—thinking concretely. We are escaping the daft “modeling” disease that haunts present economic theory. Ploughs are not isolated thingies like the corn in those silly models: they are within a flow of goods and decisions that give a direction to, say, the island culture. A shift of interest towards plough-output changes the shape of care in the community. Please do have a shot at imagining that or some parallel in your own or a local community.

Now back we go to the bottom of *For a New Political Economy*, page 312. “Principles of increasing thrift and enterprise which are normative only in a surplus expansion” become the air breathed by the masses through “the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group.”¹² On our island of *Economics for Everyone*, chapter one, there might have

⁸ See [Openers of the Positive Anthropocene](http://www.anthropositivocene.org) (<http://www.anthropositivocene.org>).

⁹ The quotation is from A. Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*. Edited and translated by Hoare Q. and Nowell-Smith G. International Publishers, NY: New York. It occurs in Toni Ruuska’s recent book, *Reproduction Revisited: Capitalism, Higher Education and Ecological Crisis* ([MayFly Books](#), 2018), p. 137. This book provides a thorough historical perspective on Gramsci’s point.

¹⁰ This is the topic towards which this little class steers you, “a pattern of laws that stand to economic activity as the laws of mechanics to buildings and machines,” *For a New Political Economy*, 42.

¹¹ A whole other ballpark here, mentioned by Lonergan at the beginning of section 17 of *For a New Political Economy*, p. 35. It can become quite visible in disaster situations.

¹² Repeating Gramsci. And I repeat—from the relevant website article “[Arriving in Cosmopolis](#)” (at note 7 there) a favorite reference of mine on the type of the masses. I give the entire note. [Economics 2](#), “The Pedagogy of Trading between Nations,” obviously on the present topic, gives more sophisticated nudges regarding conversing with the masses. Here is the note: There is an obvious reference here to Ortega’s *The Revolt of the Masses*. But I would note that Ortega’s notion of the masses was quite complex. Chapters 6 and 8 of the book are directly on the topic, but also chapter 12 on “The Barbarism of Specialization.” Saul Bellow, in

been a spread of, so to speak, potato, pleasure, and leisure benefits, but the new opportunity distracts from this. A socially imposed orientation can “make life unlivable”¹³ in such a way that the middle and lower classes don’t even notice that, indeed, a real human life is unlivable.

We have been imagining our island of plough-invention moving—for the masses, mindlessly, in tasty “sounds of silence”—into patterns of life, even of education, that are convenient for other-directed production. Push on with the imagining now, with an effort to read what Lonergan wrote earlier about “two countries *A* and *B* each with their mechanical structure.”¹⁴ The words *mechanical structure* there, I hope, are found discomfotingly discombobulating. Do they require a pause? Then take it!¹⁵

So off we go—we are still trying to read the last paragraph of our selected text—into the two pages of Lonergan’s 1942 presentation.

Two countries, *A* and *B*; two islands, Mohar and Lesser, and Mohar, with an output of 1000 ploughs a year, exports 100 to Lesser. Take it that the ploughs are sold at \$90 each, the currency being common like the Euro. So, the *DX* in this “Section 46: Mechanism of the Favorable Balance of Trade” is \$9,000.¹⁶ We might as well take the “period” to be a year, and forget about

his Foreword to the translation, neatly sums up Ortega and also the problem of the changes in the meaning of mass man since Ortega’s time. “Ortega when he speaks of the mass man does not refer to the proletariat: he does not mean us to think of any social class whatever. To him the mass man is an altogether new human type. Lawyers in the courtroom, judges on the bench, surgeons bending over anaesthetized patients, international bankers, men of science, millionaires.... differ in no important respect from TV repair men, clerks in Army-Navy stores, municipal fire-inspectors, or bartenders. It is Ortega’s view that we in the West live under a dictatorship of the common place.” (*The Revolt of the Masses*, translated by Anthony Kerrigan, edited by Kenneth Moore, with a Foreword by Saul Bellow, University of Notre Dame Press, 1985, p. ix). Much of Lonergan scholarship is done by mass men inviting Lonergan into such a commonplace, not at all the talk envisaged in note 5 above. The problem of that talk is raised in profound doctrinal fashion in the first section of *Insight* chapter 17.

¹³ It seems good to add the full context of this three-word quotation—I cherish increasingly memories of Lonergan’s voice rising on them in that lecture on art. “What I want to communicate in this talk about art is that art is relevant to concrete living, that it is an exploration of the potentialities of concrete living. That exploration is extremely important on our age, when philosophers for at least two centuries, through doctrines on politics, economics, and education, and through ever further doctrines, have been trying to remake man, and have done not a little to make life unlivable.” (*Topics in Education*, CWL 10, 232). What, you may muse are these “ever further doctrines”? Think of the 25% of an hour of television devoted to doctrinal ads.

¹⁴ *For a New Political Economy*, 94. The two pages are titled (section 46), “Mechanism of the Favorable Balance of Trade.” Did the word “mechanism” halt you in previous readings, or now? The problem to which this essay leads pushes you back to consider its meaning.

¹⁵ It is important to remember that I am not turning out a book, but offering some website help. Where might a pause lead you? It might lead you to e-mail me [pmcshane@shaw.ca] to share confusion or offer better help. In a later essay I wish to tackle the ways in which that confusion and help are enmeshed, in this stage of the emergence of humanity, in rich initial meanings that cloak our bewilderedness. But for the present, we need to share our bewilderedness as much and as luminously as we can.

¹⁶ I shift Lonergan’s presentation here from algebra to arithmetic: take note of the way it effects your reading and thinking. In my presentations at all levels I have found strange psychic blocks regarding algebra. You may find the same in your private struggle with Lonergan’s meaning. For instance, you met early the expressions G and $(1 - G)$ as cross-over fractions. Have you tried replacing them with arithmetical samples?

gold. What is important is that you persist in reaching for a more refined and effective¹⁷ conviction regarding the relevance of the distinction between the two flows in any economy: basic and surplus.¹⁸ Now we are talking and thinking about a flow that is related to the surplus circuit. Should we not put in a diagram? What sort of diagram would fit this dense 1942 piece of Lonergan's thinking?

Ploughs have been exchanged for dollars, 900 of them locally. That local flow of ploughs is 9/10ths of the full plough production. The citizens of Mohar spend \$81,000 and get that \$81,000. This leaves the extra 100 ploughs to be bought, so to speak, by outsiders. Those 100 bring in as income \$9,000 which is apart from the circular flow.¹⁹ It is here, in your reading of that second paragraph of section 46, that you may have to take time to think out better the character of the citizen's buying and selling that you read about earlier in *For a New Political Economy*.²⁰ Re-read the sentence above: "The citizens of Mohar spend \$81,000 and get that \$81,000." Your problem in reading the paragraph in question may be that you are not clear on its compacted meaning. Getting clear on that "Getting clear" gives us an opportunity for a very central feature of education and self-education, indeed of the neat Childout Principle, "When teaching children geometry or poetry one is teaching children children."²¹ Here our problem is getting clear on the paragraph which best be presented for our present adventure.

The first point is that *DY* constitutes an additional flow of net surplus income in country A. In any closed system aggregate expenditure and income must be equal; but in the open system A, there is a part of aggregate income, *DY*, of which the corresponding expenditure takes place from outside. To put the point differently, the citizens of A but all their

¹⁷ Here I think it altogether vital that you take this 'bent' seriously, that you follow along here quite definitely so that, e.g., you think of how you can succeed in "cajoling or forcing attention" (*Insight*, 423) of economic professors to wake up and smell the sunflower.

¹⁸ Two points here. First, you may find that your grip on the character of the flows and their goods is shaky: then puttering around the topic in earlier chapters of *For a New Political Economy*—or their equivalent in *Economics for Everyone*—is needed. The second point is the reach for a growing appreciation of the massive analytic shift needed, a discomfiting fresh beginning for those eruditely stuck in the present destructive one flow, one circuit, analysis. There are other points of course. I recall that great lady, Jane Jacobs, writing to me about *Economics for Everyone*, that she didn't fully understand the analysis, but that it was a relief to see that the stock market was neatly displaced out of the circuits of economic exchange.

¹⁹ You may pause and muse over my assumption of convenience: uniform pricing.

²⁰ I leave it to you to venture back to the second of my essays here, [Economics 2](#), "The Pedagogy of Trading between Nations." Part 2 is a strange presentation of our topic, a wake-up call to education and self-education.

²¹ I introduce "The Childout Policy / Principle" in section 4 "Some Methodological Doctrines," pp. 11–20 of [Cantower 41](#), "Functional Policy." It is among seven other relevant policies there, including the "Policy of Accelerating Adult Growth," a crisis policy of the negative Anthropocene: we shall return to that. Meantime think of the Childout Principle as a pedagogical version of the meaning of generalized empirical method as described by Lonergan at the top of page 141 of *A Third Collection*. That description points to a quite new culture, perhaps nicely summed up in a quotation from the poet Philip Larkin given in the final section of my [Cantower 41](#), "Self-Assembly": "Now I'll be fine, / like a sunflower." [Cantower 2](#), which began that long series of 150 or so essays, is titled "Sunflowers Speak to Us of Growth."

production, minus *DX*, continuously; but they receive all their income, including *DY*, continuously. Thus *DY* is an additional flow of net surplus income.²²

I wrote and write in terms of adventure. Even if you did in fact “get clear” on that paragraph by your previous or present reading, still it is an adventure, in that you can have the adventure of probing my trying to operate within the Childout Principle for those who read the paragraph without getting clear: sometimes even without knowing their own fogginess. Read on then with me, with a sense that there is some fogginess to be dispelled adventurously.

Our problem—and it is a deep cultural and axial problem that lurks behind the previous essay—is the poise of integral patient curiosity. I think of “children’s faces looking up / holding wonder like a cup,” but I also think of Herbert von Karajan facing Beethoven.²³ Here we are facing a shockingly new symphony of human *nomos*.

So, I invite you, for starters, to pause over that newness. Back we go to the beginning of chapter 4 of *For a New Political Economics*, whose title you will, I hope, begin to read with startling freshness: “Outline of the Mechanic Process of the Exchange Process.” The read to that freshness is a serious pause on the following piece of its first two pages. Read it and leap! The leap has a focus on the statement, “The citizens of Mohar spend \$81,000 and get that \$81,000.” Does that not sound crazy, implausible? Not if you “get” the paragraph’s point!

Our inquiry differs radically from traditional economics, in which the ultimate premises are not production and exchange but rather exchange and self-interest, or later, exchange and a vaguely defined psychological situation. Our aim is to prescind from human psychology that, in the first place, we may define the objective situation with which man has to deal, and, in the second place, define the psychological attitude that has to be adopted if man is to deal successfully with economic problems. Thus something of a Copernican revolution is attempted: instead of taking man as he is or may be thought to be and from that deducing what economic phenomena are going to be, we take the exchange process in its greatest generality and attempt to deduce the human adaptation necessary for survival.²⁴

The leap is to get, glowingly, a creative boost toward Lonergan telling us that his view “differs radically.” But you may find, or have found, that the leap takes a lot of stumbling and faulty runs. “*Experto crede*.”²⁵ Strategically I leave you to your stumblings until we face the challenge together in the seventh essay of this series.²⁶ But do e-mail me if you stumble into the

²² *For a New Political Economy*, 94.

²³ I am recalling his comment to a friend who queried “will you not be bored” when von Karajan told him he has spent the summer editing the recordings of the symphonies and that now he was to conduct the earlier ones. He replied, “For me they are new symphonies.” The topic here, dancing round *Insight* 17.1, is nescience and mystery’s haunting of our poise, a topic dealt with in a relevant context in Chapter 5, section 3 of the book [Process: Introducing Themselves to Young \(Christian\) Minds](#). The title of the section, “Fine in a Way,” echoes the quotation from Philip Larkin given at the end of note 21 above.

²⁴ *For a New Political Economy*, 42–43.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 112.

²⁶ Why the gap of two essays before our fresh start? Recall the sentence at note 3 above: “You need good humor, in every sense, to ‘come along with me’ here.” The next essay is preliminary to my joke, yes, my joke. It is a paper written for “[The 3rd Peaceful Coexistence Colloquium](#),” June 13–14 in Helsinki. The paper’s

delightful obviousness of the radical difference. Or even if you, frustratingly, don't! "The solution in its cognitional aspect will consist in a new and higher collaboration of men in the pursuit of truth."²⁷

title—and it remains the title for *Æconomics* 5—is “Structuring the Reach for the Future.” It is haunted, strangely, by a song from the Bee Gees who sing “words are all I have,” but it does not push this problem in any fullness. I turn to that question, that **what** that you of good humour are, in the sixth of the present series of essays, which begins with lyrics from the Bee Gees song titled “I Started a Joke.” Then we can settle down to a patchwork climb into Lonergan’s suggested economic science. But what I am about in the process is my final effort to get us poised properly. I am humorously and gently attacking the arrogance of present axial human learning, of its blind dancing in initial meanings. That dance “will have to go through many convulsions before it has got rid of itself, together with the arrogance of its revolt, and found its way back to the dialogue of mankind with its humility” (Eric Voegelin, *The Ecumenic Age*, Louisiana State U.P., 1974, 192).

²⁷ *Insight*, 740. The ten pages there mention “collaboration” more than 30 times. Such collaboration becomes normatively patterned in the wake—or wake-up—of the invention of functional collaboration. Our work here is a curious mixture of forward specializations.