

CONCLUSION

“...if it is possible to go to the moon, why can't we solve the easier problems of building for the ill-housed, feeding the hungry, overcoming poverty and fear of poverty...”

– Jane Jacobs¹

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The study of economics is the study of people; it is thus one of the most fascinating topics imaginable. It offers vast potential for helping those who have consistently failed to benefit from the changes brought about by modernization, industrialization, and globalization. People, wherever they live, whatever their skin colour, and however seemingly different they might be, do matter; they matter because they are human and because their suffering is our suffering.

If national governments learned to do accounting the same way that Prakash does, in terms of estimating loss as well as gain, countries and individuals would be far better off. If governments focused on wellbeing instead of on economic growth, people like Prakash would lead far more comfortable, secure lives. As to how to help Prakash, the best may be to ensure that he receives some basic assistance from the government and otherwise is allowed to live his life and earn his living, safe from the threats posed by corporations eager to seize his land or to pollute his water.

It is vital to learn to identify and question the many conventional wisdoms and convenient beliefs that have led to so much inequality and suffering. More people need to stand up and challenge economists and politicians about their approaches and policies. It is possible to find a direct path to wellbeing rather than attempt to increase it indirectly through endless consumerism. It is possible to question what is meant by development and even poverty. With a better understanding of the causes, it will be easier to identify and implement successful solutions.

More and more people can refuse to accept blindly what the media, policymakers, and economists tell them to believe. More and more people can dare to imagine something better. More and more people can read, learn, discuss, and register their protest with how things are.

I did not set out to provide definitive answers in this book. One may disagree with much of what I have written. The point is not that the reader be convinced on every point, but rather that she considers the possibility that alternative scenarios to those we are told daily to believe do exist. Simply beginning to think about and discuss these issues would be an important first step. The potential is there: it is up to us to educate ourselves, join the networks of those seeking positive change, and find our own ways of contributing to a more just and humane world.

For years, I have watched the way political, financial, and corporate leaders and the economists who support them blandly contribute to making the world worse for the poor. I have seen how governments often prioritize militarization over programs to help those in need. I have seen how classism, racism, caste and other prejudices allow the 'favoured' to look down upon and mistreat others. I have come to realize that not everyone finds the problems faced by the poor and outcast particularly compelling. As a result, I have begun to suspect that I can summarize 'all that is wrong with the world' in two main problems: first, the belief that wealth is more important than people are, and second, the belief that not all people are fully human. (Those points may sound oversimplified. True. But oversimplifications, like shortcuts, however dangerous they may often prove, do not always lead one in the wrong direction and can save much time.) If we truly believed that people are more important than possessions, and that no matter how dark, dirty, or otherwise different from us they are, that all people truly are human, we would surely act far differently. We would insist that everyone have a decent standard of living: enough to eat, clean water to drink, and access to health care and education. We would work towards ensuring that everyone has decent living conditions and towards greatly reducing the gap between those who can never have too much and those who can never have too little. We would do this not through small charitable efforts but rather through long-term policies of redistribution of wealth. We would prioritize wellbeing for people and our planet over consumption, production, and waste. In short, we would treat people – all people – as if they mattered. We must move beyond apologies; now is the time to define and achieve an economics of wellbeing.

Notes

¹ Jane Jacobs, *Cities and the Wealth of Nations* (New York: Random House/Vintage Books, 1985).

Bibliography

Note: I have listed below the books that I consider to be particularly valuable. Almost everything I have written is available on the HealthBridge website www.healthbridge.ca; all articles should be easy to find using the Web.

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