**On Quality of Life Economics**

**Excerpted from *Infinite of One***

**The following is a conversation held between the philosophical protagonist of the novel Infinite of One, Alex, and a cohabitant of his compound, Henry, held on the subject of Quality of Life Economics. In the novel the theory was referred to as Total Value Economics due to one of its core principles being that total, or net, value to human life is the moral barometer of judging the success of anything contributing to the economy. As a result of this derivation, you will hear the term ‘total value’ often during this presented reading, and in the novel Infinite of One in general.**

**The concepts of total value and quality of life are intertwined. The total value concept is based upon the idea that we create a quality of life value addition through our endeavors, production and everything else that we support, and through the subsequently rippling effects caused across humanity. From this added value we must subtract whatever value we extract, consume, hoard, prevent or otherwise cost. The difference between the two is the ‘total value,’ or net value, of whatever is being considered, whether a person, policy, practice, organization etc. The greater the total or net value, the more valuable, and successful, the thing.**

**Now proceeding to the excerpt:**

“Quality of Life Economics essentially argues that traditional conservative economics, hailing from unrestrained, laissez-faire capitalistic theory and prioritizing and encouraging the accumulation of wealth by a very select ownership class that leads to an immense and ever-growing disparity in the distribution of all things of value, and to total quality of life, or the life experience of the total populace, fails in its duty to stand as an economic theory serving the best interests of people *as a whole*; it fails to promote the creation of the greatest total quality of life for the totality of life which *must* be the goal of progressive, morally-grounded economic activity. The theory asserts that it is the ability of the economy and its contributing companies, organizations, individuals and practices to increase the quality of life of the citizenry as a whole that constitutes true success. This as opposed to pure free market economics which stresses the one-sided version of freedom for those with relative advantages to freely take advantage of those with relative disadvantages in order to extract as much value from the efforts of the relatively disadvantaged majority as possible, as well as from the insufficiently protected resource-rich regions of the world, in the course of funneling that value into the hands of a consolidating minority of wealth amassers.”

“Quality of Life Economic theory points not only to the fact that this bottom-line-is-absolute, labor-and-resource-cost-minimizing exploitation being the preeminent economic principle produces immense and growing disparities in income, wealth and directly connected quality of life between the ownership class and the working class, between the equity-holding class and the equity-excluded class, but the fact that most of this disparity in value distribution equates to a squandering in quality of life value because the ownership class consolidating ever more of the finite value in the world continues to do so indefinitely, even long after reaching its ability to use that financial value to increase its own quality of life, as illustrated by the law of diminishing returns; by the fact that as wealth is accumulated the quality of life return per dollar begins approaching zero. That value is therefore wasted after a certain point and incurs an *immense* opportunity cost considering how many suffer such a low quality of life that could use that finite value to drastically increase their quality of life because they are positioned at the front end of that curve, when it’s still ascending precipitously upward. Hopefully you can picture the graph in your mind, as we’ve both seen examples of it in our economics classes.”

“Yes, I can envision the diminishing returns graph,” Henry replies.

“Good,” Alex responds. “So, as illustrated by this graph backed by any accurate assessment of the diminishing correlation between financial accrual and quality of life return, it becomes clear that traditional free-market economic theory encourages an immensely inefficient conversion of total value to total quality of life. In this way Quality of Life Economics advocates for a paradigm shift in what constitutes success for individuals, organizations and the business practices tied to economic theory; a shift from deeming the extraction, consolidation and immense waste of value as ‘successful’ to success being defined by the ability of the economy to increase quality of life as a whole. To this far more valuable end, then, for the purpose of life is to maximize its quality, the goal of every commercial entity is to create more value in the world than they consume, and not to consolidate more value than can reasonably be used to increase the quality of life of their owners, when that entity is a business, as this value is wasted at immense, horribly tragic and unjustifiable opportunity cost.”

“That’s quite the shift…” Henry replies. “A redefinition of economic and commercial success based upon its total life impact.”

“Yes, precisely,” Alex responds. “Total life. The goal of the Spirit as well, I would argue: the maximization of the life experience of its totality of individualized manifestations. In a very real way the paramount principle of Quality of Life Economics pays homage to that quote by Einstein I’m sure that I’ve mentioned to you before, where he said: ‘Try not to become a person of success, but rather try to become a person of value.’ He saw the stark contrast between conventional societal values focusing on material and monetary accumulation as the measure of success and the creation of true value for life. He only needed to take this insight a step further: fight to redefine success *in terms of* added, total value. This is the crux of almost everything to me; the center of my moral universe. Simply stated the nihilists are flat wrong about morality having no value. Morality is *about* value. The best moral principles are based upon increasing or, ideally, upon maximizing total quality of life value, the highest value, at least from my perspective. For the ‘point’ of life is life itself; it is innately of the highest value. And the purpose of moral people is to increase that value. That is *the* moral code: protecting and increasing the value of life. It is the service of life that matters; the ability of government, the economy and the businesses within it to continually increase and protect from reduction the quality of life *as a whole* of those it serves, including by protecting and serving the healthiest, liveliest, most sustainably vibrant planetary environments that underlie and support every form of life.”

“So this, then, is the core of your economic theory… You put it in front of all other considerations?,” Henry asks. “Including the profitability of enterprises, the traditional cornerstone?”

“That’s the conventional, immoral motive,” Alex replies. “The premise that profit, what is *extracted*, is the bottom line, rather than how much the quality of life of all those involved, including the consumer and the worker, not just the extractors and excluding owners, increases. Net quality of life impact, in other words, is the only moral bottom line. As I believe I’ve mentioned to you before, all the profit in the world means nothing if it turns to cash or capital that sits or accrues unapplied to the service of life. If people’s commercial and economically-measurable endeavors produce unused or poorly applied profit after passing through the commercial system and into the hands of its claimants, it has little to zero to *negative* value. It is dedicated to those that have maxed-out the ability of wealth to improve their quality of life and is thereby sucked down an endless hole of opportunity cost and very often used *against* any movement towards increasing overall quality of life and further applied to strengthen the mechanisms, practices, systems and structures that have the ultimate effect of severely restraining total quality of life potential.”

“Everything starts for me at the moral center: what’s most moral is always what’s best for life as a whole. Which is why the total quality of life calculation is the core. The question is always: how do we produce the greatest life value? How do we best serve life in totality? It is a moral, progressive imperative to ask the total quality of life question of all things, before and with priority above everything else. To do anything else is to morally fail to some degree. Achieving total quality of life value is the marker of true, progressive success, while the question of how to maximize profit is usually the opposite question, especially when that profit is narrowly distributed and comes by way of exploiting disadvantage and environmental devastation and gradual planetary warming. So, from the total value perspective, traditional economic theory and our conventional value system and understandings have the measure of success mostly backwards, and that inverse measuring system is a reflection of a society and a globalizing cultural system of values that reveres wealth and greed above all things; which means the championing of the extraction, consolidation and waste of value. This twisted Western version of success is a clear betrayal of honorable, righteous cause.”

“The woman that volunteers at the local homeless shelter when she’s not working for a nonprofit that assists the underprivileged in finding greater opportunities and earning higher qualities of life for themselves and their families is the true success,” Alex continues, “while the oil baron polluting and warming and generally degrading and increasing the severity of costly weather extremes across the planet to enrich himself and his few major shareholders beyond the point where they can utilize that continued wealth accumulation to increase their quality of life, and therefore wasting that value at immense opportunity cost to life, is the true failure. For the woman successfully adds far more value to life than she consumes while the oil baron and his cronies fail to do the same, extracting, consuming and wasting far more value than they add. And yet we’re taught to look up to the oil baron and merely give the woman a condescending, sympathetic pat on the back for her efforts.”

“So traditional free market teachings actually promote a loss of total value, you’re saying, because they purposely disregard the net effect on quality of life that matters most,” Henry offers.

“They disregard or fail to seek and assess for it in the first place,” Alex replies. “The traditionally cited numbers mean little without the application to life and, in fact, are more often a sign of true failure than success. All the profitability, the stock market statistical growth, the employment numbers and the housing starts have no value without creating quality of life value. These numbers belie quality of life value and can conceal the fact that overall quality of life may not only *not* be improving, but may be decreasing. Traditional economic statistics could scream ‘success!’ while people’s lives scream ‘failure!’ If one percent of the population receives all the profits generated by business while everyone else’s income remains flat because the profitability produced by that ninety-nine-percent is absorbed by the other one percent, and because that one percent responds to any domestic labor and environmental challenges by outsourcing its labor and the harvesting of its resources to underdeveloped and preyed upon places and their people, how is profitability increasing total value? It’s not. Therefore, it can’t be the measure of success to anyone moral and progressive, only to conservative-minded big business beneficiaries and those they deceive through marketing, political propaganda and other mind-control methods. Most conventional economic stats have the same misleading quality.”

“A very small percentage of the population owns any considerable amount of stock, for example; any significant amount of privately-held equity in general, actually. Not only this, but stock price increases are based upon the aforementioned profitability that generally stalls or reduces quality of life measures for the majority of the population, especially the globalizing population. Therefore, stock market levels are not suitable measures for evaluating the success of the economy at increasing the quality of life of its citizenry. The movement of financial markets tends to be inversely correlated to total quality of life changes, actually, because the improving stock prices of a company represent an increasing capacity to extract as much value as possible, and such extracted value comes directly from the majority of the people and the planet, for there is a finite amount of value to go around at any one point in time. Don’t believe the conservatives: wealth, income, resource and value statistics are always a zero sum game at any given moment; the more that goes one way the less that goes the other. Let us consider some other economic indicators and see how they correlate with the difference between promoting absolute wealth and promoting total quality of life.”

“While it is certainly better for a person to be employed than unemployed, if the majority of jobs are wage-based and pay so poorly that many of their holders are barely surviving, much less thriving, to what degree do unemployment levels indicate changes in quality of life? Most of those measured in this statistic remain excluded from the profit-based fruits of their labors because they can’t afford to buy into an equity position; a disadvantage that is unscrupulously taken advantage of as a rule by the ownership class; few people even bat an eye at this accepted truth, but we all should. It’s unacceptable on the total quality of life level of morality. And with housing starts, if one percent or even the top ten percent of the population is responsible for the vast majority of the new construction starts, putting up the developmental funds for their own vacation homes and rental homes and apartment complexes to take advantage of those individuals and families that can’t afford to mortgage a home and are forced to lease them at rates of financial hardship that preclude them from saving up for their own homes, to what degree do housing starts indicate more than the rich getting richer? When increases in income aren’t generally confined to the top tier of earners then housing starts might indicate increases in overall quality-of-life. But as things now stand and have long stood they more likely indicate *decreases* in total quality of life; more exploited tenants, fewer first time homeowners.”

“So, then, the idea is to find indications of quality of life improvements for the population as a whole instead of increases in the very things that indicate a broadening quality of life disparity?,” Henry suggestively asks. “Almost to flip the analysis on its head, from service to the exclusive to service to the excluded?”

“Yes,” Alex continues. “Flip from a focus on statistics that ignore and conceal quality of life disparities and reductions to putting indications of total quality of life increases at the forefront. A flip from the small, narrowly-serving assessment to the big picture, totally inclusive assessment. Refocus the questions on the impact of economic activity on the lives of people. What is the total value to overall quality of life of this individual, this economic entity, this system or program or policy? To determine total value the amount of value that is contributed by that individual, entity, program, policy etc. must be considered, as well as how much value that same entity removes from the system, stockpiles and consumes. Are injustices promoted? Is the environment and all the people and lifeforms that rely upon it put in jeopardy? Are the quality and the extent of people’s lives increased or decreased through the consumption of the goods or services offered by the entity? Take, for example, those companies perhaps most directly responsible for reducing the duration and quality of people’s lives; those companies that undermine health for profit: the fast and processed and artificially-sweetening and unnaturally-preserving food producers and distributors.”

“Americans suffer from an epidemic of modern diseases and disorders directly traceable to the consumption of empty calories, blood-spiking high fructose corn syrup and processed wheat, artery-clogging unnatural fats, laboratory-derived preservatives, flavor enhancers, growth hormones and antibiotics in the food supply, plus inflammation-increasing high Omega 6 plant oils and diets composed largely of the gut-disturbing seeds of plants, including all grains, nuts, seeds and legumes that evolved inflammatory, toxic lectins to protect their propagating mechanisms, those seeds we have to process to eat, all spiking the risk of the biggest interconnected killers and quality-of-life-reducers in the nation, including heart disease and its strokes and heart attacks, insulin resistance and adult onset diabetes, autoimmune diseases triggered by overactivated immune systems and obesity and the cancers that come from ingesting the chemicals and hormones and having a degraded system unable to compensate and the resulting degradation and mutation of cells. If there were such a thing as Hell all the pushers and profiteers of this industry would have a special place reserved there for their sins against mankind.”

“Considering that health is the most important, valuable, indispensable aspect of quality of life, our existential basis, I would estimate that no other industry creates a greater negative value. No other industry produces more suffering, disease, low quality of life and unnatural death, not to mention the fact that our productivity dives and healthcare costs skyrocket because of them. The *McDonald’s*, *Coca-Cola*’s and *Lays* of the world, to name a few, degrade and cut short more lives selling hedonism and gluttony disguised as happiness than our military does selling globalizing profits and imperialism disguised as freedom and democracy.”

“And their profits are made off of the same people that prepare their debilitating fare,” Henry adds, having had this conversation with Alex before. “It is adding insult to injury. Or perhaps you would say just two versions of compounding injury. They eat the food because they can’t afford any better and thereby grow weaker and decrease the quality and extent of their lives while their work and sickness enriches the major *McDonald’s* and healthcare industry stakeholders, all while that same profit could do so much more to increase overall quality of life of those same workers were some of it distributed to them as earnings.”

“Yes, exactly,” Alex continues. “Opportunity cost of value consumption must be considered as well. In fact, opportunity cost is a highly valuable concept because, like all the most valuable concepts, it has near limitless, universal application. It represents not only an economic principle, but can be applied to essentially everything, every purchase, action and, arguably, every thought, and is directly connected to the cost-benefit analysis that everyone performs before doing anything, whether they are aware they are doing it or not. And, with sufficient moral development and knowledge of the suffering in the world, it sheds clear, harsh light on the immorality of Western cultural standards and values. If I look at a businessman getting out of his *Porsche* wearing a *Rolex* I am supposed to look up to him; to think him a success. We are inculcated in this manner of thinking from the moment we can reason in the morally hollow West that pays perpetually dishonorable disrespect to the value of life. For how can I wear a *Rolex* or drive any vehicle worth over, say, thirty grand knowing that I could exchange that watch for something that works just as well or drive a fully functional automobile for a fraction of the cost of the *Porsche* and exchange the difference for *immense* increases in the quality of lives of those experiencing daily stresses, pains and pressures?”

“Yes, this businessman successfully played the business game and likely put in a lot of work to get there, assuming he wasn’t born into it, but is this really how we should be taught to view success? In terms of the value extraction and immense opportunity cost column rather than the value *addition* and service to total quality of life column? There is a simple truth about business: businessmen are crooks, as the art of business is the art of manipulation and exploitation. The better you are at extracting value from the world and consolidating it in the hands of your shareholders the more successful a businessman, or woman, you are, and extraction is based upon maximizing revenue and minimizing costs, which is based upon taking advantage of every possible weakness and predisposition of the buyer, worker and planet, and reinvesting in these profit-making sacrificial pawns as little as possible in order to keep costs as low as possible and profits as high as possible. This is the definition of both the successful businessman and the successful parasite. We only revere business people because we are conditioned to do so because our conservatively dominant culture historically hails from empires and their consolidating aristocratic classes. This value system is inherently immoral, and based not upon the creation of total value and the overall quality of life of the lifeforms of the planet, as morality demands, but upon much the opposite: sacrificing this for the greed of the few. Thus, no moral, progressive person can be in business, unless they do it far differently than it’s usually done and are thereby working to redefine the practice.”

“It’s not something that most consider, that’s for sure…” Henry grants.

“No, because the conventional, conservative confines of Western culture dictate otherwise,” Alex immediately replies. “Yet it is crystal clear to me that there is a much higher standard of success, and it is built around things like listening to the heart and finding compassion through connectivity based upon solidarity of identity and purpose; becoming fuller by making others fuller; comprehending and living by the irreplaceable value of morality as tied to promoting total quality of life increases and learning and applying overlapping ideas like the total value concept and its redefinition of success based upon the value you create and distribute rather than extract and hoard. The creation of financial value, wealth and its materialistic trappings, is insufficient. How financial value is *used* to improve the value of life, its utility value, is the far more moral, progressive consideration, and is connected to the moral and spiritual heart of it all: service to total quality of life; to the whole of the manifestations of Spirit. That is, what’s the best way to apply our abilities and the finite financial and natural resources of the world to increase total quality of life, increasing the quality of our own existences by and through serving that increase in as many others as possible to as great a degree as possible? And what is the difference between this ideal and whatever we might be endeavoring towards for whatever organization we labor on behalf of… i.e. the opportunity cost? Some form of this preeminent question touches everything, not just our professional lives.”

“Economically, and as an aware, moral consumer, is the product or service worth that price, especially considering I could use that money for this or that product or service or to fund this or that relief instead, and considering the extent and severity of some people’s suffering and inability to meet their needs… considering that there are so many people that suffer such low quality of lives that you could grant them an opportunity to shoot into a skyrocketing improvement of their existence with prudent use of the value of that trade-in I mentioned a moment ago? Within these questions it is also clear that inherent to this universal principle of opportunity cost is that everything is a trade-off; *everything*. Everything of value that is purchased, consumed or hoarded is traded at a direct cost, a cost of earning, paying for or stealing that thing of value, and an indirect opportunity cost; the cost of sacrificing what might otherwise be gained with the effort, money or other thing of value used to acquire it. In the pursuit of anything of value you’re agreeing to a trade; you’re agreeing to trade direct and opportunity costs for the desired thing.”

“The key question, therefore, is always: are you getting as much value as possible for that cost? For that trade? And beyond the corrupted conservative cultural consideration of this question we must think not just in terms of are we getting as much as we can for *ourselves*, but are we getting as much possible total quality of life value as we can in exchange for the money or other traded thing of value? Everything is connected, and we must therefore attempt to see not just the immediate, direct consequences, but the total effect of our thoughts and actions. So, in the case of our consumption, is the cost of acquisition, the direct costs and the sacrificed opportunities, worth more than what we’re trading it for? What is the best value to pursue at the lowest opportunity costs, made so because that pursued value *is* the best opportunity? What is the best trade? What should I do with my time, energy, money and all the other resources at my disposal? What is the best opportunity for my own benefit, in the conservative mindset, or for life as a whole, in this progressive, total quality of life framework considering that every action we take, including the acquisition of goods and services, has a rippling effect across the market and the whole of life? It is, of course, not possible to grasp the *full* extent of this rippling impact and to keep it ever present in your mind when making *every* decision, but it is, nevertheless, the nature of causality, one of life’s prime principles, and is something that any progressive should strive to keep in mind as much is possible.”

“And we’re all conducting some level of cost-benefit analysis all the time, even if it’s not to this idealized extent…” Henry offers.

“Yes, most definitely,” Alex replies. “From the small, the ‘do I want the beer enough to expend the energy to get up off the couch and get it, when I could just lounge?,’ to the big, ‘will this profession earn me the most wealth and happiness considering I could be pursuing this other profession instead?’ or, in total value terms, ‘will this profession put me in the best position, considering my aptitude and convictions and all the other things I could dedicate those characteristics to, to produce as much value in the world as possible, and through this purpose allow me to earn the most satisfaction; the greatest happiness for myself and others?’ With every minute, ounce of energy, disposable dollar, indeed with every *thought*, within the context of attitude, ideology and all things, the tying together of the concepts of total value and opportunity cost compels us to ask: can this be better spent to increase total quality of life?”

“In economic evaluations, how efficiently is monetary value being translated into quality of life value? From a business standpoint, when monetary value is removed, stockpiled and consumed, the type of value that is perhaps the easiest to measure, how much quality of life improvement is made in exchange? As an example, take a business that extracts a billion dollars of net profit for its collective efforts; efforts contributed by all of its employees and independent contractors. To simplify things, is that billion dollars going to someone who is already a billionaire in order to create little to no increase in his or her quality of life that, in considering the opportunity costs, could instead be dedicated to *dramatically* increasing the quality of life of countless others? If it is, a *massive* total quality of life opportunity cost is being incurred, and that money was most certainly *not* successfully utilized. Much, if not most, of its total potential value was squandered. From a broader analytical standpoint this quality of life opportunity cost can be evaluated within the ‘value-to-quality-of-life-conversion’ concept I recently alluded to.”

“This conversion concept is essentially a measure of return on investment assessed from the standpoint of quality of life return instead of financial return, and can be extended to assess the potential quality of life increases that can be produced by anything of value, whether that value is financial or otherwise. It asks: What is the best use for this thing of value for life as a whole? And this is but the post-production assessment, as, in this example, it doesn’t even take into account *how* that billion was extracted; only, in the case of the billionaire, its abysmal value-to-quality-of-life-conversion; its horrendous opportunity cost and absurdly inefficient, even *negative*, conversion to quality of life, considering what billionaires tend to invest in: things that broaden the quality of life disparity across all segments of society. But, again, this is the post-production or utilization value, which is only half the assessment. In almost all cases *how* the billion is extracted and consolidated into few hands is just as abhorrent, if not more so, than the unjustifiable opportunity cost of its distribution and squandered quality of life conversion, involving exploitations of every form of human weakness and non-protection of the workforce and the environment.”

“Yes, that’s right,” Henry recalls. “In your book you emphasize the fact that to get anywhere near a complete total value picture of any commercial enterprise you need to assess the total value of both its profit derivation *and* utilization, involving the quality of life value of its products and services and all those individuals and practices involved in supplying those products and services *as well as* the distribution of those profits from the enterprise to its claimants. How much value is being produced, how much is being consumed and how ably is the consumed value leading to quality of life increases, with consumed value being a general term for value being taken out of the economy through income, including through equity compensation. And I remember how you joked that the value-to-quality-of-life conversion principle is an almost invaluable tool because it can be used for evaluating the best use of *anything* of value, not just those things of traditionally assessed financial value… including anything from a billion dollars to a bicycle to a kiss from an attractive woman.”

“What was it you said…” Henry continues, “something like: you give a multi-billionaire a billion dollars and little to no increase in their quality of life is achieved; a *massive* misallocation of funds considering the quality of life increases that would be produced by distributing that same billion amongst families facing food insecurity and the daily stresses of survival. You give a bicycle to a kid with a closet filled with unused toys and he leaves it in the garage, producing zero quality of life improvement, whereas that same bike given to a kid whose parents can’t afford Christmas presents will end up being the center of his activity and enjoyment, considerably increasing his quality of life. An attractive woman kissing a wealthy, charming, good-looking lothario swimming in sex has little impact upon him, whereas the same kiss could sustain the sad sex-deprived guy for a year. Were you joking when you wrote that?”

“Not really,” Alex replies. “I mean, it was meant to be a semi-humorous example of the principle, but jokes are based upon reality, are they not? There’s some truth to every joke, right? That’s what makes it funny. If it was pure fantasy, if it wasn’t grounded in reality to some degree, no one could understand or relate to it. It would have no impact; contain no humor. People tease others, and when those others get upset the teaser will commonly reply: ‘Come on, I was just kidding.’ But nothing is ever really ‘just’ anything. The kidding comes from some fractional truth at the least, not from pure imagination, which itself is drawn from what the imaginer has some knowledge of. Nothing comes from nothing. But, anyway, that last example you mentioned comes from personal experience, unfortunately. I say that it’s *semi*-humorous because, while some that can’t truly empathize with the agony of such severe sustained deprivation might find it funny, those that can will see it for what it is: tragic; inestimably painful. I was that guy for years on end, struggling with serious health and drug problems, lonely and deprived, seeing gorgeous women and feeling sheer heart-rending torment at how badly I wanted *anything* to do with them. A smile. A hug. *Any* type of interaction.”

“And yet I was unable to naturally earn such satisfactions, because I was locked into a highly unnatural, afflicted state of existence. I felt like even a hug would lend me the strength to persevere. Any of it would have increased my quality of life dramatically for a time; briefly filled my heart and made it that much easier to carry on. But that’s not how it works; women smell that desperation, and it thereby snowballs into increasing isolation and despair through the cruel, cold psyche. And a lot of people are in that general position, though not for the same reasons as myself. Socrates said: ‘Those that are the hardest to love need it the most.’ They don’t readily receive it, so they get far more out of the rare instances when they do. I also can’t help but feel this need as being intrinsic to our spiritual nature. Since our divide from singularity to plurality, from the singular Spirit to its infinite forms, we have this constant need to move back towards singularity, our natural state; to seek unity; to feel connected mentally, physically and spiritually, which is what is behind our being social beings and, after survival, is our primary existential drive.”

“That’s sad, in a way, but beautiful too, I suppose,” Henry says. “But you’re right, us good-looking wealthy guys don’t get as much out of such things as others would,” he says with an awkward little laugh. “But back to Quality of Life Economics… Can you talk more about how and why traditional free market economics short-sells quality of life?,” he requests.

“Traditional economics makes few, if any, of the Quality of Life Economics considerations,” Alex replies, “and asks few, if any, of the questions it poses in the pursuit of maximizing total quality of life because traditional economics hails from the aristocratic ownership class that is concerned far more with feeding its greed and consolidating value within its excluding minority than with achieving the greatest collective quality of life for people and the health of the planet as a whole that hosts every moment of every life, with its most decimated regions, of course, tending to host the most miserable individualized existences, because the rich buy themselves out of the areas which their practices tend to decimate. The economics I was taught, like most every other Western collegiate student, was geared towards maximizing profits for the excluding class, period. And without any reservations. And both my spiritual beliefs and the concept of Quality of Life Economics assert that productivity and wealth generation are of no value absent total quality of life increases, for increasing total quality of life *is* the core value. *All* disciplines, economics, commerce, politics, theology… *all* of them should serve *total* life, else they’re immoral; immoral exactly to the extent which they betray this one moral imperative; the one basis by which evil effects are created. What is known as ‘Free Market Economics’ actually purposely ignores people in its assessment of economic success because it is not the welfare of the citizenry contributing to the economy that is of concern, either historically or contemporarily, it is the ability of the economy to make the rich richer regardless of the cost to total life that irresponsibly constitutes success.”

“‘Free Market Economics’ is itself a propagandist term, considering it is concerned with the freedom of big business and its owners to do as they please no matter the cost to the broader public whose freedom to be protected from its trespasses and the gross limitations it places upon their ability to increase their quality of life is all but entirely disregarded. Again, this is consistent with the motives from which conventional economic theory was sourced: empire; dynasties; aristocracy; those that write history and prevailing theory, backing it with force and money to make certain that it prevails. It is the conquerors that generate and perpetuate the commonly understood theories and ideas in order to advance their wealth-and-power-consolidating agenda. Ideas that survive the conquering fires of history are seldom those that have the greatest good of all the people in mind, precisely because that greatest good contradicts the consolidating agenda of established powers and interests. And when those ideas do survive, such as with democracy, they tend to be preserved in name only for the sake of controlling and directing people.”

“Conservatism is oppression: oppression of people through the repression of the greatest total quality of life realization. Think about economics class and every economic assessment you’ve ever read. Almost all of them rely upon statistics that leave people’s lives out, as if economics has nothing to do with people and the quality of life they lead. Our hearts and their communication of the Spirit’s instinctive knowledge and wisdom knows better than this, of course, as do our minds when they heed this communication. The quality of *every* life matters. Traditionally, however, this spiritual truth is subdued by the greed that controls political, economic and business theory. The result is that humanity is ever under assault by its oppressing, dividing and conquering enemies: the value-consolidating ownership class actively excluding us from holding any considerable share in the bottom line, politically and commercially. Think about our economics and accounting classes at UCSB: misdirection is built into what are meant to look like unbiased, objective statistics. And the cost to the people and the planet we depend upon are left out because they reflect negatively upon the bottom line that goes mostly to a small slice of the population, with most people remaining in the liabilities column of the balance sheet as to-be-minimized costs of doing business.”

“So you think the statistics themselves are biased and misleading…?,” Henry asks.

“Definitely,” Alex replies. “Again, take the economic statistics we hear and read about and are taught at the university level in economics, accounting and business courses. Gross domestic product is a total production statistic that disregards the connection between economic productivity and the lives of the people. But, in the most extreme example, all the production in the world means nothing if the goods actually being produced, and the profits extracted by the business entity through their production and distribution, doesn’t do anything to improve the overall quality of life of those that produce, consume and are otherwise impacted by those products. You can hypothetically have an economy producing an immense quantity of useless crap that adds little value to the lives of those that feel the need to buy that crap thanks to effective, psychologically-manipulative marketing. In such a case you’d have an immense total GPD and GDP per capita accompanied by meager, if any, quality of life increases from the consumption of such products.”

“Per capita, of course, has nothing to do with the impact upon people in and of itself, it’s just a production per person statistic. Yes, countries with higher GDP’s tend to experience higher qualities of life compared to those that don’t because much of that produced value ends up in the hands of the citizenry, but there is *far* more to this quality of life conversion than the production value itself, especially the relative distribution of that value and the protection of the people, the planet and inelastic goods and services like healthcare that continue to be demanded almost regardless of cost due to their so directly connecting to and influencing the quality of life of the demanders. But even when that production is near to valueless in terms of improving the quality of lives of those that produce and consume it, an economic value will be assigned to that productivity based upon the cost of its absorbed labor and material resources all the way through its chain of production through to its final sale. It is the relative value of the products and services themselves, how much real value they add to the quality of life of their consumers, and the distribution of those products and services across the population and the financial value extracted by the entities that produce and sell them and how that value is distributed amongst those that contribute to the production and sale of the goods and services that determines *total* value; value additions minus value extractions. GDP entirely ignores this most salient of statistics: the impact upon people’s lives. And it is certainly, again, not the only statistic that paints a false picture of the well-being of the total citizenry.”

“Stock market scores reflect investor confidence and profitability, ignoring the fact that a very small percentage of the population holds any considerable stock or equity of any kind, and that increases in stock scores and GDP measures more than likely are gained via the same mechanisms that increase the disparity of quality of life experienced across society, and especially between the ownership class and the working class whose lack of privilege is exploited by the ownership class to cut costs, keep profits high and maintain investor confidence. And while the unemployment measure is relevant to quality of life, a very high portion of the workforce is barely getting by and experiencing a very low level, barely surviving quality of life in which nothing is being saved and over half their income goes to their landlord that is preying upon their inability to acquire their own home. Moreover, the most commonly cited per capita measures, including GDP per capita, income per capita and wealth per capita, are mean average measures that are thereby very misleading.”

“How so?,” Henry asks, suddenly feeling a creeping sense of guilt enter his heart and mind as he reflects upon a life of lavish indulgence and cool, detached assessment of the same statistics working for his father’s investment firm handling hundreds of millions in family funds.

“Well,” Alex continues, “to illustrate, take the most extreme hypothetical case of one person in our nation of three-hundred-million-plus people receiving all the income and wealth derived from our gross domestic production and everyone else receiving nothing, starving and surviving on handouts from the one person and whatever they produce off the land when they can escape this one absolute rulers’ compulsory servitude. And while productivity would be lower because starving people have a hard time working, let us just pretend that GDP is exactly what it is now.”

“Because the per capita scores are mean averages the stats would say the same thing they do now. They would say that income per capita is, whatever it is, around fifty thousand dollars per year, because the one absolute rulers’ trillions of dollars is averaged against the other three-hundred-million-plus with nothing to produce the fifty thousand per year mean average. So non-critical-thinkers without any understanding of socioeconomics or economic statistics and averages would look at that number and say: ‘Okay, the people in this nation have it pretty good. The average person makes fifty thousand dollars per year.’ But this is not true. It paints a rosier picture for, arguably, public-placating propagandist purposes, in order to make the public believe things are better than they are so that they’re less likely to demonstrate discontent through their beliefs, dialogue and actions, including through their political participation which, of course, is already abysmally low considering people are all, to varying extents, aware they are disconnected from any true, direct influence upon government. To paint a true picture and emphasize what should be the priority, the quality of life of the people, the *median* average and an altogether different statistical set needs to be used.”

“And what would that statistical set include, exactly?,” Henry inquires with genuine interest.

“To begin with, again, median averages and the percentage of the public that meets certain quality of life indicators that are purposefully given very little attention, if not outright ignored; indicators that are submerged and undervalued by traditional immoral conservative economists and their ownership class beneficiaries,” Alex replies. “Since income and wealth are the primary means by which quality of life is determined, as it is wealth that buys greater opportunity, greater access to high-quality goods and services, comfortable, secure homes, the ability to travel and generally get more out of life etc., the median income and median wealth per capita *relative* to GDP is a core statistic in the Quality of Life Economic assessment of the relative success of any economy; of how successfully the economy converts production to total quality of life. And, again, as a median score it will much better reflect the average financial resources available to people and families used to create and maintain quality of life, as it will not be a number falsely inflated by those very few making millions of dollars a year from large financial portfolios of stocks of those companies most successfully increasing the disparity in quality of life or from private equity in the bottom line of major business interests not being publicly traded but typically producing the same negative total value result. So long as equity is by and large held by a small segment of the population its fundamental role in determining the growing disparity in income, wealth and quality of life can only continue; only by spreading equity, by allowing the majority to be sharing members in the bottom line success of commercial enterprises rather than simply being cost-minimized, exploited tools of enterprise can this growing disparity be reversed, and most of the national and global injustices along with it.”

“But I’m getting ahead of myself. That is business theory, and I assume we are coming to that… For the purposes of Quality of Life Economics theory we start with median income and wealth per capita relative to GDP as a primary barometer of how successfully the nation translates its economic productivity into quality of life. We can call the income statistic median income per GDP, a statistic created by dividing median income per capita by GDP per capita, and can call the wealth statistic median wealth per GDP. Perhaps this pair of statistics is already in use by the more liberal economists, though I’m not aware of them and don’t hear about it. Access to IRS records would of course be necessary to generate this statistic. And you couple these median income and median wealth per GDP statistics with one or more disparity measures. Disparity statistics are already in use, of course, though underemphasized, but I like to imagine my own.”

“In one such dreamed-up statistic, you cut the population into five pieces relative to their aforementioned median income and wealth per capita per GDP numbers, giving you five quintiles and ten total statistics, five median income quintiles and five median wealth quintiles. You can then add the differences between each quintiles’ median numbers and divide by five to get a mean average disparity for both income and wealth across the nation. This set of statistics, the median averages per GDP and the disparity numbers derived from them, will demonstrate how ably or how poorly a nation’s economy is dedicated to the benefit of its total populace. You can round-out this assessment with related statistics, such as asking: what percentage of the workforce is able to save at least ten percent of its income for non-essential future purchases? A disposable income statistic that can be approximated without a survey by comparing average living costs with the median income statistic per living region.”

“What else?,” Henry asks. “Let me try to remember… something to do with stock distribution.”

“Yes,” Alex continues. “The fewer people that own stock in any company, or in an equity fund or any other financial security, the less its changing valuation influences collective quality of life. So you need to track the distribution of securities, not just their performance. You can do this for every security by tracking the number of shareholders per dollar amount of valuation, say the number of shareholders per million dollar valuation. And you can apply the same statistic to the financial market as a whole and to the various segments of the market. How many shareholders are there for every million dollars of value placed in all the firms in the S&P 500? Along with this you can track the percentage of households that have at least, say, five thousand dollars worth of equity in any combination of privately held or publicly traded companies. And you can do the same thing with all the other traditionally tracked economic indicators, turning them on their head such that they are indicative of quality of life. Housing starts, for example, are generally used as an economic indicator; as an indicator of the health of the economy. But are they, or any of these traditional statistics, truly indicative of the financial health and quality of life of all those participating in that economy?”

“That is, of course, the most important question, and the one too infrequently asked outside of progressive economic theory such as Quality of Life Economics. For, in this case, the problem is that a very high percentage of these housing starts, these approved new construction projects, become primary residences, with far too many of them representing secondary vacation homes, real estate market speculations or investments by the wealthy that rent them out at extremely high rates to those individuals and families that cannot afford to acquire a residence for themselves and are thus ripe for exploitation. So instead you track the percentage of home purchases made for the purpose of primary residency and the percentage of adults that are at least partial owners of their homes and what the median valuation of primary residences is across states and the nation compared to the median income and wealth in those states and the nation in order to determine how difficult it is for people to purchase and afford to keep their own homes, and how much of these average homeowners’ wealth is tied up in their one home. How feasible is homeownership for the average individual and family? It’s a critical component in the whole quality of life equation; a major marker of the population’s financial and connected mental and emotional stability.”

“And you do the same for the affordability of rental units across different cities, states and the nation by comparing the median income of those living in rented units in each area to the median rental price in said areas. What type of financial burden is placed upon individuals and families that choose to live in these areas? By asking these questions and gathering these statistics we have at our disposal information relevant to seeing the connection between the real estate market and the average citizens’ financial stability, even granting us a significantly enhanced ability to predict when real estate becomes an overvalued bubble to the great risk of those overly invested in it and set to lose their homes and fall on hard times when that speculative bubble bursts. I was a real estate broker when the last bad one burst, and saw firsthand the results of the tying together of the financial and real estate markets and the unjust exposure to risk position the millionaire investors put the majority of the nation in.”

“Is that it…?,” Henry asks, attempting to remember the economic section of Alex’s book.

“No, not at all,” Alex responds immediately. “Ideally you want to generate as complete a picture as possible. So you also have to track the effectiveness of government and the national culture at generating and ensuring a high quality of life, and at protecting the sanctity of the environment that guarantees that quality of life into posterity. This includes, at the very least, statistics related to higher education, healthcare, incarceration and energy production and utilization. What percentage of graduating high school students go on to attend college and at what level of long term burdensome debt commitments? What is the average cost of a bachelor’s degree relative to median income? Considering its role in assuring mental enrichment and the overall quality of life of its beneficiaries, I personally think that higher education up to the bachelor’s degree at state universities should be a free, guaranteed right of citizenry, as should health insurance, if not healthcare itself within reasonable limits, and that they should be paid for in a way least burdensome to those least able to be further burdened. Trim down the defense budget, tax carbon use and inheritance, cut tax write offs and tie taxation to profitability and distribution of equity. The more profit claimed by the fewer people in the enterprise, the higher the tax rate.”

“Healthcare and education are among those select things that should *not* be profitable, because the quality of life cost of taking advantage of those that so desperately need such products and services is particularly exorbitant and morally repugnant. Assuring that young people receive a quality education and the improved prospects and general opportunities to go with it throughout their life and that individuals and families don’t face financial burden and even bankruptcy due to health woes are among the most vital indicators of progressive nations. Guaranteeing that such basic opportunities to live a decent quality of life are not preyed upon by the unscrupulously opportunistic that believe nothing is off limits in terms of seeking out a lack of advantage to exploit for value extraction are indispensable measures of national success. Their benefits are well worth the tax-paid cost, and nothing the conservative politician can ever say will convince progressives that anything other than greed dictates otherwise.”

“From where do you think the money needed to pay those costs might be drawn?,” Henry asks.

“Again, trimming the defense budget and increasing the capital gains and inheritance taxes would be good places to start,” Alex responds. “As would, as Warren Buffett has pointed out, preventing CEOs from passing investment and business income through so many loopholes and write-offs that they pay a lower *effective* rate of taxation than their secretaries, even as they are the ones most able to absorb the cost of greater taxation rates and the ones making the most money off of the efforts of everyone else contributing to the economy and the natural resources of the planet. Then there’s the possibility of upping the taxation of anything that lowers collective quality of life and costs us all immensely in the long term, such as industrial carbon emissions, coal and petroleum extraction and the sale of things like cigarettes, fast food and inefficient, polluting vehicles.”

“But back to the educational system, Quality of Life Economics asks: What is the financial burden entailed in a university level education? What is the median cost per year of tuition, board and other expenses at the state university level compared to the median income per year earned for the average graduate? And what percentage of students are forced to take out loans for state level education, and what is the median debt upon graduation? You do the same evaluation with health insurance. What is the median cost for the higher-quality health insurance policies compared to median income? Don’t allow the statistic to be artificially watered down by allowing the lower standard policies to be included in the average. Non-risky, full peace of mind, high quality, low deductible health insurance policies are the only ones worthy of inclusion, so factor in only those with near comprehensive coverage. Ideally, of course, the government pays for bachelor level education at state universities and for all health insurance policies or, taken to the progressive extreme, socializes healthcare, making it a right, and entirely cutting out the profits and business model of the insurance companies we finance entirely.”

“Healthcare should also be about making the body stronger to cure and stave-off disease through a ‘food is medicine’ approach that makes *much* better use of the extraordinary array of medicinal compounds offered through nature and by backing healthier stress-coping mechanisms, like yoga and meditation, and by educating the patient on the invaluable rewards of exercise, turning away from pharmaceutical and surgery dependencies that tend to mask and weaken the patient over time. Not only are these approaches wiser in terms of being far better aligned with our organic constructs and being sustainable and mostly free from potentially negative side effects, but they’re *far* less costly and *far* more likely to lead to complete health rather than a healthcare dependency.”

“Then there’s the so-called correctional system that usually doesn’t correct a damn thing and which influences the law enforcement side in a particularly reprehensible manner by fighting for lower standards of crimes deserving of incarceration and longer, harsher sentences in order for private, for-profit prisons to turn suffering into patronage. What percent of the adult population is in prison, and what percentage of these are from non-violent offenses? And what is the recidivism rate? And what percentage of those that are imprisoned are incarcerated at prisons privately run for profit? All told, the more a nation is able to create the type of socioeconomic environment that keeps opportunity and general quality of life high and reduces the pressures, disadvantages and desperation that tend to lead to criminality, the better the indication the nation’s economic system serves the least advantaged members of its citizenry. And the less often those that are incarcerated are imprisoned again in the future, the more likely the underlying causes of criminality, whether they be in the individual and/or their environment, have actually been corrected. And the less profit is made off of incarceration the less likely the profit motive is corrupting the system of law enforcement and imprisonment. Then you move on to the environmental considerations.”

“Right, the environmental assessment, starting with the carbon footprint that is connected to general environmental ruin through pollution and the precipitation of global warming, climate change, gradually more extreme and destructive weather patterns and environments less accommodating to life,” Henry offers. “The less pollution and the more green energy is used, the less the environmental degradation, the stronger the ecosystems, the more the environment can sustain life and support us.”

“Yes, spot on,” Alex concurs. “And for me and for anyone even somewhat in tune to the spiritual channel, so to speak, it is not just a human concern. The quality of *all* life is environmentally dependent. The healthier the environment, the more environmentally responsible the business practices within any economy, the greater the overall quality and longevity of life that can be supported. And so some environmental assessment and the costs to the environment of economic and energy production and utilization must be considered in the Quality of Life Economics analysis. The total amount of energy that is produced within the nation through carbon-zeroed or carbon-minimized means is one critical statistic. But this statistic should be a part of the overall assessment that takes into account the source of all energy production and its relative polluting and carbon-burning rate and calculates a total score by multiplying the percentage of the state and nation’s energy production from each means by the environmental factor of each score and adding them together, and then dividing this by the number of people this energy serves such that an environmental cost per capita can be calculated. This same cost can then be applied to different businesses, such as by determining this environmental costs per dollar of revenue.”

“The more that the individual households, businesses and general organizations utilize energy derived from green sources, and the more they produce their own energy, such as through solar panels and wind turbines, and the more high-energy efficiency standards that households, businesses and organizations enlist in their operations, the lower this cost per capita or per dollar of revenue will drop. Transportation pollution and carbon emissions must also be estimated and, as more and more vehicles become not just hybrids but entirely electric, the transportation assessment must take into account the energy production assessment behind the powering of said vehicles, as it matters little if you drive an all-electric vehicle if the electricity your vehicle uses comes from a coal-fired power plant. So the average miles per gallon of new vehicles sold per year must be combined with an appraisal of the environmental cost of the hybrid and all-electric vehicles sourced from powerplant statistics.”

After a long pause Henry asks: “Is that everything?”

“I’m entirely certain you could come up with more,” Alex replies, “but I can’t think of any more at the moment… So what you do now is create a composite of the combined scores for every state in the nation. You add all the scores together to get your Total Quality of Life Value. How successfully does that state or that nation promote, produce and protect a high and increasing quality of life for its citizens as a whole? You can then compare state against state and nation against nation, even subdividing into county and city comparisons, depending upon your ability to gather economic data and, of course, you can attempt to learn from the comparison. And you can compare changes over the years and decades in order to determine relative improvement and its causes.”

“You can apply lessons gleaned from the relative success of one against the relative failures of another. And if you really want to do a comprehensive assessment you apply Quality of Life Economics principles not just on a macroeconomic level, as per the statistical set we’ve been discussing, but on a *microeconomic* level as well, as the compendium of micro constitutes the macro, and the details of the micro can be very revealing of valuable information. This means evaluating individual companies, institutions, systems, and potentially even people. What total value is the company responsible for? With many companies the answer would be a negative value, depending upon your assessment. What quality of life addition does its products or services offer relative to the price at which it offers them? What total added quality of life can be attributed to its sale of goods and services after subtracting what it extracted from the people of the economy and from the planet’s environments for its efforts? To what extent are its business practices ethical and environmentally responsible? How much pollution does it create? How much of its energy use is sourced from green, renewable generation? To what extent does the profit that it produces improve the quality of life of those involved, including its patrons, workers and owners both domestically and, if it’s a multinational company, across the planet?”

“This of course includes how well its employees are compensated, in terms of salary, benefits and, ideally, equity sharing. The same median, disparity and quality of life measures applied to the broader economy can be applied within each business by, for example, comparing the median executive pay with the median non-executive pay, and determining the quality and general value of benefits offered to the median employee and the environmental costs of its business practices both in terms of its production and the source and quantity of its energy consumption. And the whole supply and distribution chain that feeds the company must be considered, from raw material extraction to production to sales and distribution. If it is sourcing the raw materials for the production of its wares and/or is having its wares produced in an area of the world with few, if any, labor and environmental regulations and policed protections, this must be accounted for, as must the carbon costs of transport.”

“Okay… So, ideally, with enough people dedicated to deriving, compiling and calculating the statistics you end up with a massive database of Total Quality of Life Values for every entity, from the national and state governments on down,” Henry offers. “And… right… if I remember correctly from your book, you advised this database be used as a guide for everyone involved in the economic paradigm shift, correct?”

“Correct,” Alex confirms. “These measures would serve as effective signposts in directing the shift away from economic analysis supporting the consolidation of value and quality of life toward that analysis supporting a pursuit of *total* value maximization. The assessment of total value of life as a whole can be referred to as a basis for everyone, and for any decision with economic implications, with statistics such as those we’ve discussed supporting the effort. The consumer, worker and investor can all take heed. Like many, I long ago realized that everything is connected, and that the causal chain stretches from the past through the present into the future in ways that are impossible to perfectly estimate with our limited perception, instrumentation and other means of data-gathering and calculating. Nevertheless we can approximate, and must all be aware that economic and business causality are as real as any other form and are inseparable from total quality of life concerns; little else has more significance in this paramount pursuit, in fact, for quality of life requires a wherewithal more dependent upon economic analysis and business endeavors than perhaps any other matter. Most people don’t seem to think about it or take responsibility for much of this causality, but they are a part of it nonetheless; that is an inescapable fact of life.”

“When we buy a product or service we financially support everything and everyone that goes into creating, marketing and distributing it; we contribute to the demand that perpetuates its supply, and the manner in which it is supplied. Most everyone has heard the Latin expression ‘caveat emptor,’ or ‘buyer beware.’ Usually this is a reference to the consumer protecting his or herself from an overpriced, poorly produced, even dangerous product. But within the context of Quality of Life Economics ‘buyer beware’ has far more profound, far-reaching implications. Beware of who and what you support, the total net quality of life value of those persons and things being supported and the practices and chain of causality being perpetuated for all those impacted by that support.”

“When I consume chicken or eggs, for example, I contribute to the manner in which most of these beings are treated, when they are conventionally raised and slaughtered, at least; most of the males are killed at birth and the chicks are packed into foul, crammed confines, beaks rounded off so the squabbles inevitably resulting from their forced proximity won’t harm the merchandise, separated from their offspring, stuffed so full of growth hormones that they can barely stand and then sent through a conveyor belt slaughtering system. It is torture of a feeling being followed by murder, plain and simple. The combination of our detachment and associated ignorance encourages our complicity because we don’t witness the evil first-hand, even when we’re aware of it on some level. Out of sight, out of mind, but *never* free from effect. For our ignorance and detachment, willing or not, never relieves us of our responsibility when we financially reward those directly involved. It makes us complicit aiders and abettors of the moral crimes against life, regardless of the law’s failure to reflect that crime. A true progressive must ask why the crime is not recognized in the first place, and who undermines the necessary regulations that *would* criminalize it. But that is another big ball of wax bound up in the plutocracy’s perpetuated evils.”

“That’s why you don’t eat meat?,” Henry asks.

“Some wild seafood,” Alex replies, “at least on my current diet,” he adds with a self-deprecating snort. “But the average American consumes four times the protein they can healthfully utilize. Amino acids, the constituents of protein, are in almost everything and, generally speaking, plant-based protein sources are *much* more nutritious than animal flesh, in terms of all the micronutrients that accompany the protein in the plant, and contain little to no heart-disease-precipitating forms of animal-based saturated fat. Those plant foods contain *far* more of what we need and what protects us and minimal to nothing of what threatens the quality and extent of our lives. So if you’re consuming whole grains, beans, nuts, seeds and other plant-based protein sources in addition to meat, something which I don’t recommend for most people owing to the fact that these plant seeds produce inflammatory responses, you’re likely overloading your system with protein, the excess of which your body processes as waste, stressing the kidneys, or converts into body fat, encouraging obesity, especially when combined with an overconsumption of carbohydrates, and especially still unnaturally processed sources of carbohydrates; the so-called ‘enriched’ grains, which is actually a euphemism for stripped-down with a few essential nutrients added back so that those who foolishly rely upon them don’t become malnourished, as they did in the past, the cause of the deceitful ‘enriched’ terminology.”

“‘Enriched’ is but one example of food industry propaganda, essentially. Too much animal product consumption also opens the door of dire consequence for your cardiovascular and digestive systems while supporting a factory farming industry that is irrefutably immoral and uses more water and energy and releases more planet-warming gas into the environment than almost any other sector of the economy. Because of energy lost in the conversion of plant food into animal protein it takes somewhere on the order of five to ten plant calories to produce one calorie of animal protein. Therefore, for reasons of health, morality and environmental protection I try to eat as little animal-derived food as possible, as such consumption breaches irrefutable codes of ethics and personal responsibility on several important fronts: health, morality, environmentalism and economics. And when I do eat it I make sure it fed upon its natural diet, as we are not only what we eat but what we eat eats; ruminants like cows or bison naturally graze and eat mostly grass, not grains. I prefer wild seafood overall; not ‘wild-caught,’ as this is another misleading, propagandist term, but truly wild. When you combine the fight for progress across these fronts of the food production and distribution industry you find that the highest dietary standard is organic, whole vegetable and fruit centric, wild and as raw and local as possible.”

“Organic for environmental ethics,” Alex continues; “for sustainable high levels of soil health and the microorganisms they host, and to prevent the pollution of rivers, lakes, the ocean and the water table from the runoff of unnatural elements. Vegetable and fruit centric for health reasons, for such a diet means you’re likely consuming a ton of micronutrients, but for moral and spiritual reasons as well; to prevent the torture and general suffering of lifeforms raised in horrid conditions with no lives or purpose other than to be fattened for the slaughter of *far* more protein than we need, plus the food, land and carbon cost of raising animals for slaughter. Raw, uncooked food, because such food is in its whole, unprocessed, uncooked form and is thereby the most nutritious, quality-of-life-boosting form of the food you can eat, as the heat of cooking and the mechanisms of processing destroy nutrients and degrade the health of the consumer. Local for many reasons, including the carbon cost of transporting foods, the unnatural, health-degrading preservation elements packed into foods that need to pass very long periods between production and consumption, the mentally and spiritually-enriching benefits of being more directly connected to cultivating crops, the fact that the closer to the source from which your produce is derived the fresher and more nutritious it will be, as it begins to degrade upon being harvested, and the economic ethics of supporting local growers instead of massive, irresponsibly-pollutive agricultural and shipping corporations. Ideally everyone will be supporting a local CSA and growing their own.”

“The absolute pursuit of profit absolutely sacrifices what’s best. And on this localist front the ideal is obviously food grown by those that consume it; grown on the very property they inhabit. The food is the freshest and most nutrient-dense because, again, degradation begins the moment of harvest, and there’s almost zero cost of transport, environmentally or monetarily, and no need for chemical preservatives. But it’s also critical to realize that ‘organic, vegetable and fruit centric, raw and local’ needn’t be an all-or-nothing practice in order to serve as a highly valuable guide. It’s the platinum standard; the pinnacle of progressive, quality-of-life-supporting consumption, in my opinion. The total value you create or cost the world, and especially yourself, is relative to your level of adherence to this higher standard. My own consumption is closer to a gold standard. This property doesn’t produce everything we consume, for example. And, as I said, I eat some wild seafood and cook some of my food.”

“The extent to which I am a proponent of Hippocrates’ ‘food is medicine’ approach to consumption cannot be overstated, as nothing is more vital to the quality of one’s existence than health, that which impacts every thought, action, outlook and potentiality of the individualization, and nothing is more determinant of health than what one consumes. And to that end, with all my research and experimentation, I have learned that the Standard American Diet leads to gut damage, inflammation-spiking fatty acid imbalances, the displacing of more nutrient dense foods and the conditioning of the body to build rather than burn fat. I have come to wholeheartedly embrace an approach to consumption that adheres to the way our ancient, pre-agricultural-revolution, even pre-fire ancestors ate, one that consequently honors our evolved biology’s by keeping as much of our food as possible in its most nutrient dense, natural, entirely unprocessed and uncooked form, as cooked food not only drastically degrades nutrient density but creates toxic, carcinogenic and inflammatory compounds. If over half our food is cooked our bodies react as if to an invader, triggering what’s called ‘digestive leukocytosis.’”

“To all these ends, to maximizing all the vitality maximizers and minimizing the vitality and longevity minimizers, I’ve become a raw-plant-centric paleo eater, and close to a ‘Raw Pesca-Paleo;’ that is, I emphasize an approach that I believe is in line with human evolution, how we evolved to eat for highest health, and which doesn’t cause autoimmune and inflammatory issues, thereby cutting out grains, legumes, seeds, dairy and nightshades due to their toxic lectin counts, and which emphasizes raw, organically-sourced healthy fats, vegetables, fruits and truly wild seafood, not deceptively labeled ‘wild caught’ seafood, which isn’t actually wild. Wild seafood has the healthiest fat profile amongst the animal products while being a lot less carbon intensive and not promoting the environmental ruin and abject cruelty of conventionally raised for slaughter land animals. I also eat probiotic fare like kimchi, sauerkraut and kombucha and eschew inflammatory excess salt, plant oils and added, unnatural concentrations of carbohydrates, especially sugar in all forms.”

“Over time this cleans out the system, solves the unnaturally permeable gut issues rampant in our society, the ‘leaky gut’ underlying all autoimmune issues and most modern health ills, remedies inflammation, strengthens the immensely symbiotic healthy bacteria colony in our guts and gradually makes the body a natural fat burner, rather than a carb dependent body fat accumulator. I consider this approach, which runs largely parallel to the popular Ketogenic, Whole 30, Paleo, South Beach, Atkins and similar approaches, the ‘Evolution Diet,’ meaning that which we physiologically evolved through the *vast* majority of our genetic history to consume for complete health and vitality. It is a natural, organic diet of whole, nutrient dense foods that places your body and brain in the mild fat burning state of ketosis in which we evolved to thrive as hunter-gatherers, entirely eschewing all those post agricultural revolution foods, cooking and processing methods traced to modern consumption based ailments, which are most ailments, drastically diminishing the quality and extent of our lives while enriching the doctors and pharmaceutical companies that we’d largely run out of business with this approach.”

“So you’re basically saying that, ideally, we must be aware of the full impacts of our economic choices…” Henry says. “…which includes every aspect of our lifestyles. An immensely tall order, indeed.”

“Ideally, yes, we would be fully aware of the total extent of our impact upon the world; upon the quality of our own lives, upon the lives of others, and upon the health of the environment,” Alex replies. “But, as you imply, this is not feasible. It is the target for which we aim, but rarely hit dead center. And it is only the progressive or idealist that has the strength and courage to shoot for the target in the first place, and that strives to be principle-bound; this includes the principle that knowledge is not only personal power but, through causality and conviction, empowers all of life; everyone and everything our choices touch. Quality of Life Economics is about focusing on the production and gathering of information relative to the connection between economic activity and the impact upon the quality of life of the planet as a whole. That is the knowledge it seeks to accumulate, champion and disseminate in service of life. The easy route, of course, is usually the opposite route; the route of lowest value. In this case the easiest route is not to pay attention or, not far from the lowest standard, to pay attention only to conventional, blindingly misleading indicators that betray the service of life.”

“Most seem to consume based upon whim and pure hedonistic desire; based upon instant gratification alone. And this method of buying and consuming is *extremely* costly when extrapolated across the entire global consumer base. Also, of course, the progressive practice of analyzing the total costs involved in the things we purchase, use and consume goes well beyond application to the food industry. It applies to every sector of the economy. When we buy a product or service that has a negative total value we are complicit in that reduction in total quality of life. If you patronize a company that does evil, *you* do evil. If you patronize a company that produces great value, that does great good, *you* do great good. There is no way around it, regardless of your ignorance, detachment or justifications. It is the same when we interview for a position with a company, or decide to invest in a company; we are supporting and encouraging that company, and whatever profession we decide to vie for and whatever practices the company continues thanks to our support and the support of others like us. Investors don’t generally take this into account; it is only profitability and future stock market valuation increases and decreases that are prioritized. This is pure greedy irresponsibility; it is morally and spiritually hollow, as it ignores the negative total value impact produced when we invest in, buy from or work for companies whose endeavors yield negative values for life as a whole. This is why it is highly irresponsible and detrimental to life for us to determine our professions based solely upon our compensation.”

“While it takes great moral development and discipline to live by this principle it is irreplaceable and undeniable: not witnessing or being directly adversely affected by your actions doesn’t eliminate the effects you cause or absolve you from contributing to those effects. You are part of the causal chain, admitted or not. The same goes for value-adding effects, of course. If a tree falls in the forest and you didn’t see it or hear it fall, it still fell. And if you took a hack at it with an axe before handing the axe over to someone else and walking away, you are inseparable from its fall. Don’t be self-centered, be selfishly rewarded by fostering the greatest possible quality of life with what you do and contribute to in the world.”

“Is this why you decided to become a writer, and to work to develop a property that would sustain all the needs of its occupants without depending upon the production of food, energy and other commodities from sources you feel you can’t trust and don’t want to depend upon?,” Henry inquires.

“That’s what I’m shooting for,” Alex replies. “What *we’re* shooting for, I should say. We still depend upon the outside world, and to a great extent this might be seen as unavoidable, especially considering the fact that the world has so much to offer that we can’t, or shouldn’t, dismiss or ignore… so many people, places and ideas that stand to enrich us in ways that financial enrichment can’t come close to approximating. I think that determining your profession, what you will dedicate your life to, is a *very* difficult decision that should not be taken lightly. It is one of the most important determinations anyone can ever make, in fact, and will have wide-ranging effects rippling across the world, most of which we won’t be privy to. I think that when we strive to make this decision we have to consider two factors above all else: conviction and aptitude. Developing your own outlook on life must come *before* determining your profession in order for that profession to truly represent you… for you to be ‘true to yourself,’ as is said. I discussed this with Stacy the other day…”

“Unless your work represents who you are, unless you contribute to what you believe in to the best of your ability, you won’t feel that highest sense of fulfillment that comes from finding your purpose. And, again, this is a two-fold objective. You have to combine your conviction with your aptitude. Determine how you’re best naturally endowed to contribute to the outcomes you most believe in *through* the organization that provides the best avenue by which those outcomes may be pursued. And if that avenue can’t be found, pave it yourself or along with other men and women of shared conviction. Ultimately this will yield you the most satisfaction and sense of purpose *because* it will represent your best possible personal total value contribution, or close to it. This satisfaction will be all the more attainable for those that do the required self and societal examination and research in order to, again, find their conviction, aptitude and the best possible organization by which to apply them.”

“If, on the other hand, you forsake such a total value greater good in the pursuit of mere profitable extraction of the most exploitable people and places of the world, following the purely capitalistic model, there is no way to avoid feeling unfulfilled and morally and spiritually accosted by your personal contribution to such an unjustifiable opportunity cost. This is the curse of those that serve the greedy impulse encouraged in the West and most of the globalizing world; they feel an internal conflict, guilt and hollowness because they have forsaken their truest self and their greatest possible total value contribution to the world, trading it for the mere pursuit of profit. And while it is not necessarily the case, the more profitable a company is the more likely it is to have a negative total value. This tendency is due to cost-cutting measures and to artificially inflating the sales value of products and services by controlling supply. Most practices centered upon minimizing the cost of doing business can be traced to worker and buyer exploitation and environmental degradation and failure of protection; to taking advantage of people’s disadvantage and to extracting natural resources and manufacturing products in those places with the poorest environmental and labor protections.”

“The lower the protection, the lower the cost. The less educated and privileged the worker, the more desperate they are for a job, the less they can be paid, the lower the cost of their productivity dedicated to a bottom line made larger through their exploitation. In fact, the stock market encourages *decreases* in total quality of life by rewarding companies and stock owners for this exploitation; by creating a competitive environment in which companies and their executives and investors are *rewarded* for their ability to extract as much value as possible from life and the planet and reinvest in that life and planet as little as possible. For this reason the more profitable the company and the more appreciative its stock market history the more likely it is to have a negative total value. This is what stockbrokers, investment bankers, equity fund managers and the like are really selling: reduced overall quality of life. And if consumers, job seekers and investors are armed with total value scores they will at least have the information needed to make a more positive total value of life decision.”

“And from what I recall the business structure that you advocate in your book is designed to facilitate the economy’s capacity for increasing overall quality of life by attacking the exploitative nature of the equity-consolidated company that delivers the vast majority of its value produced by its growth and its profitability, its bottom line, to a very select, excluding group of owners,” Henry says.

“Yes. Well said,” Alex replies, impressed with Henry’s representation of his concepts. “It is the exploitative nature of commercial enterprises that extract value from the vast majority of those contributing to the economy and that funnel that value into the hands of a very exclusive class of major equity holders that possess the wealth to buy into newer and ever more consolidated ownership positions, positions of privilege that exclude the vast majority, that, in unavoidable turn, produces the disparity in income, wealth, opportunity and general quality of life which is itself the cause of the vast majority of national and global injustices. It is the consolidated equity of the conventional business and especially the sprawling, market-dominating corporate model that makes traditional business practices and the effects they produce in the world inherently parasitic. The host, the global populace at large, remains far weaker and unfulfilling of its greatest potential quality of life because the one percent parasites keep us in that state by leeching away our potential through their disadvantage-based oppressions. And, as I recently stated, the traditionally one-sided ‘Free Market Economics’ model and the plutocracy that controls the political establishment and the messages beaming through our TV’s maintains this parasitic status quo, corrupting, corroding and eroding everything in its path, which includes almost everything.”

“The greedy and brainwashed will condemn this truth as socialistic, but it is nevertheless a truth: the absolute pursuit of profit corrupts and degrades everything it touches. And the more that profit is consolidated by fewer corporations and their ever fewer major stakeholders the more wealth and power is given to an ever more exclusive few and their paid cronies and the more the profit motive corrupts because it is more easily and efficiently controlled and wielded. This is one reason why the establishment and spread of a business structure such as the model I conceive of, what I call the Business Collective, is so imperative: it counteracts this movement of consolidating quality of life value that is costing humanity and the planet so immensely and unsustainably. Its pervasive success would represent a major shield against the corruptibility of the human mind as well as a countervailing force fighting disparity in all things, including and boiling down to the egregiously growing quality of life disparity across the planet. Don’t get me wrong: profit is, at least at our current stage of mental development and spiritual awareness, integral to incentivizing the productivity, innovation, risk-taking and meritocracy of just reward that are fundamental to the ability of any economy to increase the overall quality of life of those that participate in and benefit from that economy. But it is my belief that if any economic contributors are denied that incentive and meritocratic justice then they remain mere tools in the profiteering tool belt. They are oppressed victims whose value is extracted by bloated and ever more bloating unscrupulous parasites.”

“Which is why you focus on equity, correct?,” Henry inquires. “On a claim to the bottom line?”

“Right, because it all starts in that one place: business structures that use the majority to enrich a small and decreasing minority,” Alex responds. “The inherent injustice of the traditional capitalist model of consolidated business ownership and its major equity holders’ claim upon the vast majority of profits accumulated into wealth is revealed in the zero-sum concept: every dollar of profit claimed by one individual or group is a dollar that cannot be claimed by all other individuals and groups such that increasing the profitability of the one to five out of every hundred individuals with any significant equity holdings must necessarily decrease the profitability of the other ninety-five to ninety-nine individuals. That profit is produced through many inputs, including some innovation and risk-taking but mostly hard work and extracting finite resources from the planet and the unsustainable environmental degradation that these practices incur. Nothing is free. Everything has a cost. And the opportunity cost paid by the vast majority through the conventional equity-excluding business structure is one that is not near to fully recognized by most.”

“So when, as we often hear, up to five percent of the population claims ninety-eight percent of the profits through their consolidated control of the equity of business, most of the cost is incurred by the other ninety-five percent of the population and the planet, both in that those ninety-five percent of the people lose the right to claim ninety-eight out of every hundred dollars the global economy produces, dollars that they would use to increase the quality of their lives in ways that *far* surpass what the exclusive ownership class does to increase the quality of their lives with more money, *and* the fact that much of the rest of the negative side balancing the zero-sum equation comes down to the fact that business is profitable *because* products and services are marked up so high above their cost to produce and because every disadvantage of the workforce and lack of environmental protection is exploited to create the negative side that balances the zero-sum equation. Not to mention the fact that it is that vast majority that tends to live in proximity to the environmental ruin and vulnerably exposed to the increased risks of pollution and extreme weather patterns that the excluding minority tends to be insulated from through their means. It is, in other words, the consumer, and especially the vast majority constituting the workforce and planet that vast majority depends upon to assure its continuity and basic quality of life that pays the negative, balancing side of the total value equation; most people, and most forms of life in general, are zero-sum losers.”

Henry says nothing, poking at a mound of Redwood needles with a stick while reflecting upon all the companies that his family’s investment firm has speculated on over the years, and how many of them he’d subsequently heard about on the news and in liberal publications with regards to everything from bribing public officials to denying employee benefits to outsourcing production to cost-effective locales like India, China and Southeast Asia. Alex continues: “Honestly, it pisses me off that I had to uncover these truths on my own because their popular dissemination, that even hinting at the existence of such ideas in school, would threaten corporatism and the plutocracy it puppets and that wields that power in so many deceitful, concealed ways, including by influencing lesson plans from elementary school all the way through the highest ivory towers of academia. It isn’t just history that is written by the inheritors of lands and fortunes wrought by military and economic conquest.”

“Every academic discipline has been tainted by the twisted motives of those afflicted with the disease of greed, and it takes a questioning, skeptical, historically-informed and so-called ‘cynical mind,’ which simply means recognizing the inherent nature of being a self as it relates to motive, just to break free from the confines in which conservative tradition attempts to cage our minds before we can even begin to see the truth: that the interrelated motives of greed and power are the driving forces of history, and that but a select sect of morally developed men and women, many of whom have been adversely affected by those driving historical forces and have witnessed first or second hand the suffering its injustices have wrought upon those unable to defend themselves, have found the conviction and courage to battle the brainwashing on behalf of the brainwashed. Thankfully the pressures that push for moral progressivism have been mounting for so long that it’s starting to break through to the political stage, as evidenced by the idealism-killing obstructionist tactics that had to be used against Obama and, more recently, by the rising popularity of rare progressive politicians like Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren. While I don’t know if she is the original source of the quote or only the most recent individual credited with saying it, Warren may have summed up this whole fight as succinctly as possible when she addressed the winners made through losers, zero sum nature of profit and power consolidation with one astute aphorism: ‘If you don’t have a seat at the table, you’re probably on the menu.’”

“It reminds me of that scene in the film *Braveheart* when Gibson’s character, William Wallace, is attempting to rally the Scottish clans to his cause of fighting for Scottish independence but, in so doing, has to prevent those clans from fighting amongst themselves for the bribes that the king of England extends in order to keep them divided and conquered, for if those that may oppose a ruling system fail to unite and form an indivisible front then it is easy to divide, repel and scatter that opposition… Wallace says something like: ‘You’re so busy fighting for the scraps that fall from the King’s table that you’ve given up your God-given right to something far greater.’ Whether we’re fighting for the falling scraps or are the main course itself, the message is the same: we don’t truly have a seat at the table, even though those that do possess such a seat do everything in their power to convince us that we sit beside them. In *Braveheart* Wallace was talking about Scottish nationhood and the right of his people to determine their own destinies, but the principle holds true today across the United States and the globalized world in the broader political and economic context that affects all of our lives.”

“And that broader context is..?,” Henry asks, playing along.

“That ‘we the people’ have no true control of or ownership stake in commerce or the plutocratic republic that, especially through the Republican Party, does everything in its avaricious power to prevent any popular movement away from the ability to exploit the people for the consolidating of value in as few hands as possible,” Alex replies. “Regardless of what they say to conceal it and dupe the gullible, this objective defines the conservative agenda and has throughout American history both domestically and in our foreign policy, from the Cold War to Vietnam to the surreptitious undermining of countless populist rulers and the insertion and propping-up of brutal pro-corporation dictators. It is their one *true* motive. Freedom, democracy and the like are merely used as justifying façades to fool the non-critical-thinkers; to trick those that can only see what is said, not the truth concealed beneath the façade of misinformation. And so long as we remain dogs domesticated for *their* self-serving purposes, strapped to *their* sleds, mushed to pursue *their* greedy interests while content to fight amongst ourselves for the scraps that fall from *their* tables, possessing but an illusory seat at those tables, we can never be ‘we the people,’ only the ever conflicted, divided, distracted, oppressed, fractured factions of a nation and a race sacrificing its greatest total quality of life potential in delay of our greater destiny.”

“Now, I’m *not* saying there shouldn’t be a table, so to speak; that there shouldn’t be private ownership and interests and a market economy, as forcing everything to be held in common regardless of contributed value is unjustly non-meritocratic, and I strongly believe you need incentive, reward and private property in order to encourage productivity, efficiency and innovation, to permit people autonomous developments and to avoid the pitfalls history has demonstrated when it comes to outright socialism, such as the inefficiency of planned economies and communism’s invitation to tyranny, as few individuals and governments can be trusted with the essentially absolute power possessed by the communist regime. What I *am* saying, however, is that everyone needs a seat at the table and that, for the best interests of the vast majority, not everything, not items of inelastic demand due to their immense quality of life value, should be on that table. Commerce requires the same in order to be just and promote total quality of life: seats for everyone at the table; though it does not require an equal position at that table regardless of merit. But business must be comprised of people working *with* one another as fellow owner-operators rewarded a merited equity share of the bottom line, not *for* a greedy minority that hoards all the equity. Equity or exploitation.”

“I was always taught that it is but a matter of hard work and determination,” Henry replies after a moment of reflection. “That anyone can become wealthy and prosperous if they want it bad enough…”

“There’s no denying hard work is irreplaceable,” Alex replies. “And that through ability, hard work, education and determination a person hailing from an underprivileged family has a chance to fight their way through the parasitic business structures that economically enslave and repress the potential of most lower classmen, so to speak, and can, through that fight, hope to improve their station and enter the shrinking middle class. And a very select, determined, capable few even break through to the upper class that does everything it can to exclude them from its thin minority membership, for the greater the number of owning upperclassmen, the less each may own, something which is understood at least on a subconscious level by those in the ownership class. But by and large the lower and middle classes are tools in the belt of an ever more exclusive class of profiteering major corporate equity shareholders. And the less advantages these tools of profit possess the more they are taken advantage of, for exploitation always exists relative to the ability of the exploited to fight off exploiters whose exploitation is not only sanctioned but encouraged within any few-holds-barred capitalistic economic system such as that which reigns over the Western and globalizing world.”

“The immoral exploiter often calls his or herself a ‘realist’ when justifying his or her actions, for, as has been said since the ancient Athenian Empire ruled the Hellenic world: ‘The strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must.’ This is where mankind’s overall evolution has been more or less stalled for the last twenty-five-hundred years. This immoralist-labeled-realist ideology is still used to justify evil action today; a so-called realism that denies the *true* reality of man’s inherent *corruptibility* for the commonly accepted belief perpetuated by religion and aristocracy that man is inherently evil. This belief is encouraged in order to coerce and control us in the facilitation of wealth and power consolidation. For if we believe we are inherently evil we can justify our evil and the evil of others as unavoidable. And businesses taking advantage of weakness is the most common form of evil that everyone involved in business, including the consumer supporting reprehensible business tactics, as I mentioned, contributes to. Saying ‘it’s not personal, it’s just business’ is one of the most cliché and misleading of justifications, for nothing impacts more persons, more workers and consumers and qualities of people’s lives, than business; than commercial activity. True, the losers in business are typically not personally *targeted*, they are simply in the way; they are set between the profiteers and their profit. But that’s precisely the problem: people and planet are bulldozed over as if they aren’t only not sacred, but as if it’s entirely natural and even ethical to do so. That’s the business ethic: running roughshod over anything that stands between you and the almighty dollar, only pretending to possess a different ethic as a deceptive marketing ploy to manipulate public perception for profit. People lose, sothe results are *very* personal.”

“Implying it’s okay to wrong people and destroy the planet because that’s simply the nature of business is essentially what is being said; it is an indictment of conventional business structures and tactics and an admission that free market economics is a moral failure. And, as we’ve discussed before, evil can never be logically justified as an inherent quality of humankind or an inevitable outcome of humankind’s interactions, as the truth is that evil isn’t an inherent characteristic of humankind, isn’t an inborn quality of humankind, regardless of what the Church says to guilt us into submission and what the corrupted big business interests repeat to justify their evil actions, but is actually an action and outcome born of *inherent limitation and corruptibility*. There’s an immense, indisputable difference between inherent evil and inherent corruptibility built upon mental and physical need and limitation, as we’ve discussed. And, in the difference between them, the lies of the aristocratic ownership class, the conservatives and those that historically control minds through the Church are revealed and rendered erroneous; they can clearly be seen as the unjustifiable justifications of the weak-minded and immorally greedy.”

“The consolidators are leading people away from truths that, if known and well enough spread and accepted, would set people free from their yoke,” Henry adds, “perpetuating falsities that keep people bound to pull the plows of profit, the yields from which they are excluded.”

“Nice,” Alex says. “Not a bad metaphor. And you’re absolutely correct, for without a share in the bottom line you’re essentially a modern day servant or workhorse, segregated from enjoying the sweetest fruits of economic production and relegated to a cost of doing business. This has long been the case. And it is of course due to the fact that the prevailing societal status quos across the Western and globalizing world hail from conservative traditions and values perpetuated by political and business empires and their ruling dynasties. And most of these largely irredeemable traditions and values, and the beneficiaries that invest in their continuity, will have you believe that anything else, any economy composed of anything other than the traditional equity-consolidated businesses, is non-free-market and is therefore not free and evil and akin to communism. This is an outright lie. This is simply justification and propaganda than most very sadly and to their own disservice and the disservice of everyone with whom they come in contact swallow whole without mentally chewing and digesting it and letting it pass through them to be excreted out the other side as the crap it must be considered.”

“As we’ve discussed, the freedom to be protected from the exploitations of those with greater wealth and power is just, if not more, important to the well-being of the people as being free to do whatever you like; the greatest freedom comes from denying the corrupted the freedom to do whatever they wish, including controlling the government, preventing true democracy and setting about tearing down anything that inhibits their capacity to extract as much of the world’s finite value as possible, for such abuses deny us the possibility to freely pursue our greatest potential and highest happiness. The wiser individual knows that the more valuable freedom is this freedom *from*; the freedom from the aforementioned evils, in the broader context of protecting society from the unlimited, unrestrained trespasses delivered upon it by the prevailing powers which rule over it, and the freedom from one’s more self-destructive inclinations born of need and the mental and physical corruptibility that go hand-in-hand with being a physical and mental self; the personal type of freedom from granted by the development of discipline; by way of the difference between knowing what’s right and doing what’s right; by knowing what’s in one’s best interests and having the will to enact it and deny anything that precludes it. Furthermore, absolute capitalism and absolute socialism are the extremes; it need not be a simple dichotomy; that all production and property be either commonly or privately owned and administered.”

“The notion that capitalism and socialism are inherently at odds and even mutually exclusive is false, in my opinion. I believe the best system lies in their considerate convergence, protecting certain segments of demand from being taken advantage of, using tax revenue to do a better job of paving the way for broader public benefit and guaranteeing that those that contribute to the bottom line receive a merited share of that line, not a restricted, cost-minimized straight-line compensation regardless of profitability and contribution. In the modern day political parlance the word ‘socialism,’ much like the word ‘terrorism,’ has become mostly hollow demagoguery; propagandist terms used to rule over people by taking advantage of their ignorance, fear, vulnerability to peer pressure and other mental shortcomings. These terms are largely insubstantial.”

“That’s quite an assertion,” Henry responds. “And, I imagine, not one that would curry much favor with most people.”

“And that’s by design,” Alex immediately replies. “Those terms are part of the compendium of tactical terminology used to produce knee-jerk, prejudicial, emotional reactions of condemnation of anything that conservatives deem ‘un-American’ or ‘un-democratic’ or ‘unpatriotic’ or infringing upon our ‘freedom,’ as if, again, freedom is a one-way street that everyone benefits equally from keeping wide open, even as the overly-privileged minority plow over the vast majority and keep us under their tread by way of that street being so wide open. It’s mass mind-control strategy used to tear down anything that challenges the ability of the ownership class to continue to reinforce and expand their capacity to extract and consume the vast majority of the world’s wealth and power to the gross detriment of the vast, excluded majority of people. If you read, watch, write, talk about or otherwise support any idea or activity that shines a spotlight on the injustices produced by this one-and-only conservative pursuit you paint a target on your back as an ‘anti-American.’ And if people start to listen to your ‘socialistic’ ideas and ‘unpatriotic’ posts or writings or group meetings, you’re an insurrectionist primed for NSA surveillance. Call me delusional, but I have reason to believe I’m being monitored myself, as a couple *Facebook* ads I’ve created in the past and a *Kickstarter* campaign I concocted as attempts to drum-up support for projects that dealt with such subjects were mysteriously wiped-out. And when I contacted customer support for those sites I was informed that my accounts were hacked and had to be deleted as a result.”

“The freedom to think, speak and act in any non-violent manner is supposed to be sacrosanct and guaranteed by the Constitution, but as soon as you speak against prevailing systems and commonly-held conceptions you’re looked upon and potentially treated as an enemy of the people, even as you’re actually a champion of the people dedicated to their best interests; to their collective victory. And if you become too active in your pursuits then half the American public and the imperialist hawks in Washington and anyone loyal to them in the intelligence and armed services wings is comfortable calling you an anarchist on the verge of terrorist ideation. Ironically, however, the US military and the actions spurred by imperialistic neo-conservatives have terrorized more people across the planet since World War II than anyone, but those that resist their violent meddling, incursions, coups, puppet dictators and occupations, whether in their beliefs, writings, thoughts and actions here or through the violence-against-violence resistance in invaded and occupied lands abroad are the ones branded ‘terrorists.’”

“Of course, not all terrorists are created equal, and there are some that attack indiscriminately that are deserving of the condemnatory moniker. But that doesn’t change the fact that non-critical-thinkers on the right of the political spectrum are conditioned to believe that anyone that fights against corporate sponsored imperialistic adventurism designed to expand the ability of the few to extract natural resources and profit off of the many, but packaged and sold as the spreading of freedom and democracy to the unjustly ruled, is immediately ‘evil’ or ‘unpatriotic,’ when, in fact, most of the time the exact opposite is the case. Evil is what’s being resisted, and true patriotism is fighting for the best interests of the majority of citizens, whether that fight is political, macroeconomic or in the microeconomic business environment. And that current conventional business environment is most certainly *not* the best that we can do; it is *not* in the best interests of the majority and it is not free as a form of business organization either, because we’re not free to own any piece of the pie until we can afford a buy-in price that most will never be able to put up. And the type of business structure that grants us all the freedom to earn a merited share isn’t purely socialistic either.”

“Because you are not arguing for public, governmental control of property and the means of production in all but the most sensitive and select segments of the economy, correct?,” Henry asks.

“Right,” Alex continues. “Socialism is public ownership of industry and property. Except in the case of selected segments of the economy which supply necessities for guaranteeing a decent quality of life and that are always in high demand regardless of the price of their products and services due to this necessity, what are known as inelastic markets, because demand doesn’t stretch with increases or decreases in the price of supply, I don’t think that socialism is the answer. As I said, certain markets of inelastic demand, such as for higher education, utilities, health insurance and even, in my opinion, healthcare itself, *should* be socialized, because people, especially people that can least afford it, should not have their needs, often their very financial and even literal survival, exploited for profit, increasing their stress load and their financial burden and lowering the quality of their lives because they aren’t free from having their *needs*, not their desires, but their direct-line-to-basic-quality-of-life needs taken advantage of. This is why these foundational goods and services should *not* be corrupted by the profit motive, because exploitation in these markets is particularly costly to the total quality of life of the people. And certain such vital goods and services can be cost-effectively provided if freed from profit, even taxpayer paid, rendering this immense popular value at a minimized cost-to-benefit ratio.”

“Take higher education, for example. Except for the inevitable political backlash and obstruction that would come from for-profit educational institutions, teachers unions and student-loaning financial schemers, there is no good reason why the instant, unlimited communication and edifying capacity of the internet could not be used to encourage programs following a model like *Khan Academy* to take over a major portion of the higher education system at an astronomically decreased cost to the student or, ideally, to the state. Add some regional test-taking facilities and the ability of all of these purely internet-based educational institutions to award degrees signed off on by accrediting boards and any properly motivated individual could receive a college degree acknowledged by employers at minimal cost such that even if the students and their families have to pay that cost they are nevertheless freed from crushing debt as they virtually attend courses that can be just as educational, empowering and professionally-applicative as the education provided by any brick-and-mortar institution, though they would miss out on the social skills development and fun of attending a ‘bricks and mortar’ university, the only major drawback to such a system.”

“You’re suggesting that the prestige of attending and receiving a diploma from well-reputed higher education institutions comes at too high a price, especially without financial aid,” Henry says.

“Definitely,” Alex agrees. “I mean, don’t get me wrong, I personally see immense value in a lifetime of learning and in being liberal about the education process, challenging and asking questions and constantly expanding one’s edification and perspective, never discontinuing the learning process which, for the most part, can’t really be discontinued anyway. For experience is the greatest teacher, and books can be read anywhere and are only restricted to the academic experience for people who detest reading. And discussions with learned individuals are, of course, possible everywhere as well, and offer an equally valid educational pathway. It’s the social experience of attending a physical university that can’t be simulated. While it doesn’t fit the conservative paradigm of education and the way that conventional society equates degrees framed and mounted in your office as an indication of your worth, I myself realized long ago that far more is learned *outside* the walls and books of the formal educational environment than within, especially over an extended timeline and even more so when it comes to naturally inquisitive intellectual individuals that insatiably consume information.”

“Again, personal enrichment is about experience of all kinds, from reading to exploring to every interaction we have and every observation we make, and this empirical edification occurs far more extensively outside the traditional classroom than within it. But to the extent that formal education is beneficial and required by employers it need not place an unnecessary financial burden upon those that will always have a demand for it, especially the young that are currently commonly saddled with a burdensome debt for what should be a guaranteed, cost-minimized opportunity. And while we’re discussing education I would add that there are at least two subjects I believe are *highly* undervalued in conventional curriculums to the great disservice of students: aptitude as it pertains to careers and nutrition as it pertains to quality of life. There is nothing more important to quality of life than health, and nothing more important to health than consumption. And there are few bigger decisions anyone makes in their lives than determining what they want to do with their lives professionally, and a lot of young people need guidance in this, especially if they’re anything like me: interested in almost everything.”

“What are you suggesting, exactly?,” Henry inquires.

“There should clearly be dedicated courses in high school that continue through at least the freshman year of college on aptitude testing, the exploration of career courses and financial aid planning as well as on budgeting and paying off loans and the best grants and loans to seek etc.,” Alex continues. “It shouldn’t all come down to the student finding the motivation to go to a career center and doing all their own research for the simple reason that not everyone is that highly organized, self-motivated and disciplined and we must, if we deign to become a truly progressive society, aim to serve everyone, perhaps most especially the indecisive or the vulnerable, stressed or otherwise disadvantaged; those whom, in this case, can’t summon the courage or, in my case, are too overwhelmed by the endlessness of options, to do what is required to discover the best path for them; those lacking the wherewithal to fully take advantage of everything required to put them in the best possible position to succeed in the future. I mean, if you’re not preparing students for the best possible future *post* matriculation, how are you not failing them? And how is extensive aptitude testing, career exploration and navigation of the financial student aid system, which shouldn’t be necessary, as it should be free… but how is the absence of these services being integral to the educational system not representative of such a failure? High quality education should do a greater service to the students through such alterations in the curriculum, and by not placing a huge financial burden upon those that can’t afford what should be a right. And this setting up the youth for future success and for the providing of great value to society is but one example of how making the guaranteed, inexpensive yet immensely valuable supply of a commodity approaching an inelasticity of demand the priority over the profit motive and its greedy proponents can yield a *far* greater total value output for all of life.”

“I believe I’ve said this already but, because of its importance, I feel the need to reinforce the fact that the core Quality of Life Economics principle isn’t applicable to just private pursuits; to the activities of privately owned businesses and their effect upon people’s lives through the economy. Rather, it’s a highly valuable, even invaluable principle in that it can and, I believe, *should* be applied to any consideration of the expending of resources, including not just money but time, energy and general effort. The question should always be: how best to translate this resource into *total* quality of life, to the improvement of the existence of ourselves and as many others as possible? We were just talking about inelastic goods again; those commodities which retain their demand regardless of cost because of their indispensable influence upon total quality of life which, I believe, is directly applicable to the moral imperative of good governance to provide for and guard against the exploitation of anything that provides immense quality of life benefits to the public at large, which is another way of saying anything that is of immense total value. And earlier I alluded to the fact that our government’s fiscal policies are woefully inefficient at translating public resources to total value for the public; limited resources that are commonly tragically spent to maintain avenues for the wealthy to maintain or increase their wealth, including through our ‘Defense Department’ and its positioning our corporations to tap into overseas markets of all kinds. Tax write-offs, or deductions, as well as government-paid subsidies to big business sacrifice untold fortunes every year to those already sitting on massive fortunes. Tax code and fiscal policy is complicated, of course, but they all too commonly render a paltry, even negative value of return on the public’s limited resources, especially if you take into account the opportunity cost of this misuse.”

“What cost?,” Henry plays along.

“The cost of using such funds to invest in anything that substantially, even incalculably adds to the public welfare even and, I would say, especially if this involves exchanging it for the expenditure of public money used to help the wealthy increase their wealth, as that wealth tends to be used to consolidate more of the limited wealth and power to the disservice of anyone but the already wealthy. It is crystal clear to anyone with progressive inclinations that governmental budgets, federal or otherwise, need drastic overhaul in this Quality of Life Economic manner; in ways imparting great, broad benefit across society. We all know the spending categories I speak of: environmental protections, increasing opportunity for the disadvantaged, increased green energy investment, increased financing of collectively owned businesses like the Business Collective I advocate for, increased spending on social services and providing free or at-cost higher education and healthcare, increased spending on parks and communal areas and increased ‘public spending’ in general. We’re missing inestimable opportunities to provide for the public good to equally inestimable total quality of life return with our current fiscal policies.”

“So, in line with such taxpayer-paid or cost-cut broadly benefitting goods and services your business concept, Business Collectivism, seeks to close the disparity in quality of life across society further by better distributing the profits produced by the remainder of the economy, reinforcing the lessons and priorities advanced by Quality of Life Economics, going from a macroeconomic to a microeconomic, each business basis?,” Henry asks.

“Yes,” Alex replies. “The economic theory I put forward in *Time for True Democracy*, Quality of Life Economics is a theory of economic assessment aimed at promoting success in terms of how successfully an economy supports the continued creation and maintenance of the greatest possible total quality of life, as opposed to other traditional measures of success that disregard the quality of life measure that I believe must be made paramount if your economic analysis and policies are bent on producing just progress; and its principles, statistical focus and studied indicators are based upon facilitating the only moral goal: the creation of as much total value for life as a whole. On the level of the individual business, the just, or most meritocratic, progress is made possible by plugging people into the bottom line; by making people true *partners* in the institutions to which they dedicate their efforts and much of their lives. This is, of course, not unlike the purpose of true democratic design. For no system can truly serve the people as a whole if the people don’t have an actual seat at the table; if they are not a directly plugged-in, directing part and bottom-line beneficiary of that system. And, again, there’s no reason to be tied to black-and-white, all-or-nothing conventional concepts.”

“When it comes to the theoretical contest between socialism and capitalism, between the private and public ownership of property, and in consideration of the means of production and the distribution of economic value, it’s clear to me that it shouldn’t be a contest at all, but a calculated collaboration between the two relative sides of the spectrum. Dispensing with the unjust aspects of the two while preserving and promoting the most valuable aspects of each promises the greatest output and total quality of life impact. The goal should be to maintain the merited incentive and reward of hard work, risk-taking and ingenuity of capitalism while supporting socialism’s increased opportunities to pursue the best interest of the people as a whole, including through redirecting the tax dollars of, ideally, a purified democracy towards removing certain industries from the absolute pursuit of profit and the prevention of the exploitation of need as well as preventing unjust over-consolidation of commercial profit and all the disparities in opportunity and quality of life and evils ultimately created as effects caused by that gross disparity.”

“So, just to be clear, you’d leave commerce open to private business and market mechanisms in all but select inelastic, fundamental economic sectors,” Henry summarizes, “like education and healthcare and… maybe utilities and basic foodstuffs, with this last, the basic foodstuffs, if my memory from past discussions serves me, being promoted through federal, state and local governments advocating of and investment in widespread, affordable community supported agriculture subsidies and low-rent plots in community gardens and the like whereby most anyone is granted access to affordable, locally, organically-grown produce. And you design your business concept around the blending of the most valuable aspects of capitalism and socialism, correct?”

“Yes,” Alex concurs. “You don’t preclude profit or force a redistribution of wealth or command the economy or foster government participation in or ownership of anything but the most vulnerable markets most sacrosanct to the guarantee of basic opportunities and quality of life, but instead you naturally encourage an environment that preserves the complementing qualities of the two systems in terms of how they naturally synergize to support the best interests of the vast majority. Again, pure socialism fails because it destroys the incentive to work hard, innovate and take risks that produce so much of the value within any economy and its individual commercial operations, and because it fails with regards to merit; it fails to justly reward and incentivize the production of greater value. Even if you were to discount merit and fair reward, the simple fact is that we’ve not yet evolved to the point where you can depend upon most people to provide their best effort, harness their greatest ingenuity and take the type of chances that lead to the best rewards for the greatest numbers, including themselves, based solely on love for their country, on a sense of community, on a strongly ingrained and well-developed morality, on a heightened spiritual awareness of the inseparability and total interdependence of life or on any of the other aspects of elevated consciousness. This was Mao’s naïve overestimation in communist China before the country began to blend in more of the free market: that patriotic zeal was sufficient incentive to compel the people to follow a planned economy regardless of the contribution-to-reward ratio.”

“But even if you could produce such a non-compensatory-based emotional, spiritual, patriotic fervor, it would remain unjust to remove commensurate reward for hard work, innovation and risk from the commercial system. It is reasonable to argue that people *should* personally benefit from providing more value, whether that benefit is financial, moral, spiritual, political or otherwise. Ideally reward should be multifaceted, actually, involving all these forms for their combined force of motivation, if for nothing else. But, of course, financial reward tends to be preeminently motivational. So where the choices of consumers, or demanders, of any commodities nearing desire rather than anything nearing necessity or fundamental opportunity, as with higher education, is driving the demand, natural market mechanisms tend to produce the best, most just results, both because they justly reward those that produce more value and because more value is created for the people to benefit from due to the production and value-to-cost increases made from the existence of reward-based incentives and market competitions. Not to mention the fact that the more markets that are socialized the more powerful, bloated, slow-moving and open to corruption and nepotistic collusion between industry and the government that controls those markets becomes, which often leads to tyrannical regimes and their commercial cronies that have historically given socialism a bad name.”

“Pure socialism places all of the nation’s wealth and power in the hands of the government and its hierarchy which, again, is just as great of a threat to the people as capitalistic consolidation moving towards oligarchic plutocracy, as in the US. Possessing such total control only encourages corruption, cronyism and nepotism on the way toward tyranny, as Nazi Germany and the socialist regimes prevalent in Russian, Chinese and Cuban history, citing some of the best-known examples, have essentially proven. Again, however, I feel compelled to emphasize the fact that these are failures of outright socialism in states lacking sufficient democratic controls balanced by well-spread private business interests and equity distribution; to consider these failures demonstrative of socialism’s futility is erroneous and misses the point; it misses the lessons offered by the respective histories of these states as applicable to the political, economic and business theories and structures which we are discussing.”

“So pure socialism and especially communism destroy merited incentive and lead to tyrannical regimes and autocratic rulers that suck the life out of the people,” Henry offers. “But the same thing happens if economic and political power are too wide open, too ‘free’ in the traditional sense of those with power having too little restriction on their power, such that those with all the advantages are ‘free’ to do much the same as the autocratic controllers of their nations and their backing bands of cronies.”

“Yes, exactly,” Alex replies. “Going too far the other way from the socialistic extreme to the capitalistic extreme produces a similar result. When politics are plutocratic, when prevailing economic theory emphasizes wealth creation while paying little more than lip service to the total quality of life application of wealth and all other resources of value, when business structures funnel all the profit generated by the economy to an excluding clan of owners who use those funds to buy politics, you end up with the same unchecked, unbalanced wealth and power inviting the same collusion between business and politics; the same corruption, cronyism and nepotism, but this time moving towards corporate oligarchy, with mega corporations and political factions hogging all the wealth and power in a contentious yet often cooperative relationship with one another whilst the disparity in quality of life between them and everyone else can only continue to grow due to the zero sum nature of their control and extraction, resulting in a thinning middle-class and a large portion of the population living a painfully low quality of life struggling to survive because far too much of the reward produced by the economy and all the power divvied-out politically is passed to a very select and excluding group of people, encouraging greed and corruption and sucking all the value out of the majority of the population’s endeavors. Therefore it is clear that the only just forms of politics, economics and business empower, motivate and reward all people in a merited manner while protecting them from over-consolidation and its propensity to propel corruption and destruction of the greatest good.”