



True Price From Concept to Strategy

ECONOMICS CONFERENCE
Report of the 13th Annual Meeting

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True Price

From Concept to Strategy

This meeting was held at André Gasset College, Montreal, Canada from 21 – 25 June 2014.

A 'true price' is forthcoming when a person receives, as counter-value for the product he has made, sufficient to enable him to satisfy the whole of his needs, including of course the needs of his dependents, until he will again have completed a like product."

– Rudolf Steiner, *Economics Course*, Lecture 6¹

This year, 21 participants from 6 countries met for the second of three consecutive annual meetings planned to take place in Montreal, Canada. We opened with the verse given by Rudolf Steiner on 28 September 1924, which was chosen last year to be the one we will use until the 100th anniversary of the Christmas Conference. Several translations can be found at the end of this report.

Following on from last year's meeting and our ending resolve to focus on Rudolf Steiner's meaning of true price, many participants had worked assiduously with the economics course to come to grips with this central yet difficult concept at the heart of Steiner's economic thought. There was a palpable sense of substance in our midst, born of the effort of will needed to engage with this content. Of this, Marc Desaulles observed, "even though we are only 20, we have a common image (of true price.) This we don't have to discuss anymore."

In the Light of the 14th Lesson

Upon this ground, Marc began our work together with a profound presentation of Rudolf Steiner's economics course in light of the 14th First Class Lesson of the School of Spiritual Science. He put us in mind of Rudolf Steiner's final lecture of the Christmas Conference, entitled 'On the Right Entry into the Spiritual World: The Responsibility Incumbent on Us', explaining that our link to economics is an outer expression of our link to the School of Spiritual Science. In a precise consideration of the First Class Lessons and the parallel content in the economics course, he showed how both describe 'right entry into the spiritual world.' Reminiscent of how for the Greeks philosophy was an outer, public (exoteric) version of the sacred (esoteric) mysteries, known to only a few initiates, so the economics course is the exoteric version of the First Class Lessons in our day.

What does this mean? Marc explained that Rudolf Steiner's work culminated in the Deed of the Christmas Conference through which the whole of World Intelligence

¹Rudolf Steiner, *Economics – The World As One Economy*, New Economy Publications, 1996. (All subsequent citations are taken from this book.)

became accessible to modern humanity. But true access to it requires one to hold together both understanding of content *and* commitment of will – a virtuous attitude committed to *doing something*. These are two elements that when united within a human soul, create a temple where man and cosmos meet and enable the right entry into the spiritual world. The steps for this entry are described esoterically by the 19 First Class Lessons in the School of Spiritual Science and exoterically in the 14 lectures of Rudolf Steiner's economics course.

Marc then gave a precise overview of the first 14 Lessons. In the first Lesson, we learn that the world does not give any answer in our struggle towards an understanding of ourselves. It is at the point where we no longer find the answers to our existential questions on earth that the spiritual world comes to meet us. Correspondingly, in the economics course, the first premise is that our material-scientific, earth-bound thinking is not apt to encompass the realities of economic life; economics requires awareness of different operative laws. We are brought to the threshold of the spiritual world: on this side lies the illusion of values, (reflected by figures, values carried by money); and on the other side the living reality behind those figures, (what's spiritually real – the human striving, the karmic working of human beings).

In the first three Lessons, when we come to this threshold, we perceive that the three elements of our soul separate; we see that we can *think* one thing, *feel* another and *do* a third. (This is one reason anthroposophists are so complicated! The nearer to the threshold, the more one must struggle.) In this regard, economic life is a field of exercise par excellence! Who hasn't had the experience of carrying a noble idea (such as biodynamic agriculture) and doing the opposite (of noble) when it comes to paying for it? How do we hold these inner forces together? This is the next very real challenge to manage when entering into the spiritual world: when we can no longer use our physical body as a reference point, how do we bring our thinking, feeling and willing into harmony?

The next step, Marc explained, is to realize that what we consider our body and the body of the world as a whole are *one* world; we have to become cognizant of this at the threshold and through the forces of our I – our inner attitude to carry this position – we create a temple, a place where we can live with the spiritual realities which are also the spiritual beings. From an economic perspective, I become conscious of myself and the world. Economics is both a practical and an ethical science, meaning that what I do affects others. The world and I belong together. Only when this becomes evident can one meet the economic realities, i.e. the striving of human beings and groups of human beings on earth. (This is what double-entry bookkeeping is all about.²)

² Max Weber (*The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, 1904) was recently quoted in a New York Times article as saying that in the Renaissance, everyone active in economic life knew how to do double-entry bookkeeping, and they knew that they were keeping their books for God. They began each page with a sign of the cross to remind themselves of that.

But this means that we have to become aware that there are laws that must be respected, laws of this side and laws of the other side of the threshold. This is the point in the 14th Lesson. The soul is then confronted with a shock: for the first time, rather than receiving instructions from the Guardian, we are questioned – and warned. Finding ourselves inspired, we become aware of three possible sources of that inspiration – and we must choose, if we are to regain our footing. Having lost everything at that point, in order to regain ground, we can either choose to rely only on the spirit – “as long as the spirit...” (Christ) – or we can disdain matter and leave it entirely (Lucifer); or we can try to take matter with us, depending on it even as we go where its laws are not operative (Ahriman). And each response has its consequences. The first leads to new orientation, the second to no link with reality, and the third to a loss of wakefulness.

This background of the 14th Lesson brings us directly to the question of how to enter economic life in the right way. How do I find my reference? What ground can I stand on? In his economics course, Steiner describes in economic language the phenomena, the choices we encounter in the 14th Lesson: I enter the economic life in the right way *as long as* I rely on the spirit in the other human beings, meaning as long as I work for the needs of the others. Alternatively, I can be wrongly trapped by my egoism and act only for myself. Steiner makes this point about egoism in his third lecture. Through his famous tailor example, he shows that, because we live in a time of division of labor, if we work for an income, meaning for ourselves, rather than to fulfill the needs of others – we will unequivocally prevent the conditions in which true prices can emerge. Similarly, *as long as* I rely on the spirit of the other when I lend my money, values will be real. But if I lend to the other’s house or car or machine – i.e. by requiring a material object as collateral – I am trapping in matter what belongs to the spirit and will first have to deconstruct this illusion before being able to approach the question of true price. This point comes in the fifth lecture in which Steiner cautions us that we are on the threshold of economic life and may very easily be prevented from right entry by our own attitude.

A Second Chance

Christopher Houghton Budd followed Marc’s presentation with a poetic assemblage of world images. We are all witnesses to the consequences of humanity’s post-World War I economic choices. That era’s illusions are now deconstructing as the ‘false countries’ designed by Woodrow Wilson’s nation-state philosophy fall apart. This crisis of our times will not resolve itself until we go back to the decisions made after World War I and choose a better path. Then we can have a second chance. We have to find ground like that which Rudolf Steiner offers. Current economic thought is the last vestige of English imperialism. Rudolf Steiner recognized that, partly because of its folk soul, it would be England out of which the one world economy would emerge, and with it, a free spiritual life. But now, current economics education teaches with ‘tricks’ such as the supply and demand ‘curve’, thus imprinting images that lull people out of their capacity for thinking and willing. We must get back to Dunlop. At a later point in the conference Christopher stated, “The recent Annual General Meeting of the Irish

Anthroposophical Society revisited the 'wound' of Daniel Dunlop. He was pushed out (of the Society), and then died. Dunlop's work, a practical implementation of Steiner's one-world economy, could not make it to the world stage, but remains 'unfinished business'. This is a task, however, that can only begin by the anthroposophical movement 'rehabilitating' Dunlop, then all of us picking up where he left off."

These times are asking us to recognize that there are three significant points in economic history: Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas and Rudolf Steiner – one individuality evolving economic consciousness throughout time. And now it's up to us. Can we pick up where Steiner left off?

To begin to do so, in our break-out sessions, we sought to identify the obstacles in the way of and solutions for lending without collateral. Fear of losing 'one's' money, of not having enough for later life, lack of real economic understanding, need for support to build trust in lending and the need for financially-grounded, capital-seeking initiatives were all things identified in this process. (Adjacent to this but not unrelated was the discussion resulting from the *Colors of Money* seminar held the following weekend in which the subject of pension funds arose as an element that exacerbates the problem of illusory value creation.)

These thoughts made an urgent call to our will, to which Meg Freeling responded eloquently in the following text, written and offered by her as an inspiration for our work.



Michael holding down the dragon
A Bas Relief (Louvre)

A contemplation of this art piece reveals Michael, the Spirit-Regent of this present age, holding down the dragon that thwarts humanity from fulfilling its true purposes during this window of time in its evolution. This effort by Michael is taking his full strength, his wit, his equilibrium. Yet, through it all, he is earnestly looking elsewhere. Perhaps, in his deep concern, in his penetrating eye, he is silently saying:

"I've cleared a place for you -- for a short time -- and I will hold this devil down a little longer. But dearest freedom-questioning human souls in whom I have placed all my hope, in the Name of the Christ Whom we serve -- what will you create out of the Nothing-Space that I have wrestled clear for you? Whatever inner forces you are able to muster, whatever nobility of soul you can bring to bear, whatever fine deed you can envision yourself doing, by all means possible, do it now!"

Concerning Section Work

Christopher characterized the work of the Economics Conference in the light of its karma and purpose. Speaking with some urgency, he said that *for him* the continual absence of an Economics Section is preventing a spiritual scientific image of economics from coming to humanity. Concerning the Economics Conference (where individuals, professionals meet regularly in a free-standing conference), it is an endeavor to ground its work on Rudolf Steiner's economics course. If it appears to be developing in link with particular individuals who have been working together for many years, this is because karma works through concrete individuals and by working on clear content for extended periods.

The substance of the Economics Conference needs to make its way in the world. Using the analogy of a flight of birds to describe the wonderful division of labor between brothers and sisters, he said:

"In a flight of birds, not all are flapping their wings at the same time. Some are flapping, others are having their wings flapped. So, if you perceive a weakness in a colleague, provide the force that is missing. In this way, too, the Adversaries' efforts to isolate each one of us can be countered, for they know that karmic self-sufficiency will never work. As far as economics is concerned, we must work together on a shared content. One cannot avoid a lonely path, and the Adversaries will make it lonelier and lonelier with ad hominem arguments more and more their weapon of choice. But a circle of researchers can work to show what Steiner has brought into the world and by so doing, protect themselves.

In Christopher's view, section work is a means for rising above personal karma. As such, the work of the Economics Conference also has to be unequivocal (without being fundamentalist) in its focus on the economics course and on true price in particular.

The Language of True Price

The work of the Economics Conference, as Marc put it, "has as its long-term aim a threefold social life. But today this is not possible because of the monolithic national state." He emphasized the importance of citing very precise dates and times of Rudolf Steiner's work with the threefold social order, during which time all his forces were focused on fighting the monolith of nationalism coming from Woodrow Wilson. But after the Treaty of Versailles locked nationalism into world policy in 1918, Steiner

specifically said in the beginning of the 1922 economics lectures, that we now need a *new* language and that language is the economics course.³

True price being at the heart of that language, various individuals and groups had taken practical initiative to further the idea during the past year. Lucia Sigolo, from Sao Paolo, Brazil reported on a workshop she organized that provided opportunity for people to discuss true price in the context of individual initiative and modern conditions. Lucia's fully funded budget included enough of a surplus for contributions both to the Anthroposophical Society in Brazil and to the Economics Conference.

Marc gave a report on a start-up of a new kind of exhibition at L'Aubier on Rudolf Steiner's economics course. The first installation, entitled 'True Price, True Income', traces economic history from Aristotle through Thomas Aquinas to Rudolf Steiner. It is presented on 11 large, portable panels, displayed in French, German and English, and will be followed by new content five times a year, all of which will be published in booklets. People are invited to the 'museum' for discourse at the end of each installation.

Anita Grandjean reported on a group study of Steiner's economics. She explained how the format of their work together and concentration during a two-month period on each lecture facilitated a fun, intimate and effective venue for deepening participants' understanding of the content.

Christopher reported on several projects. The Economics Conference website has been set up to encourage worldwide debate and reporting. It aims to create an economic reference point otherwise not in the world that is grounded on Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas and Rudolf Steiner. Various themes can then be considered against this background, such as examining the concept of basic income and how one would arrive at this on the ground of Steiner's economics.

He reported on a true price symposium held last November in the Schreinerei at the Goetheanum with Marc, describing it as 'a serious, very focused workshop'.

He also showed a new publication on true price from the 2009 Economics Conference at L'Aubier. The book is an example of a newly created worldwide brand of associative economics publications being developed, which is funded by the world at large through the Economics Conference Account. It is intended to make available a growing body of literature coming out of the Economics Conference.

³ "The position is now such that we can no longer speak in the same forms as we did then. Today another language is necessary; and that is what I want to give you in these present [economics] lectures."

The Economics Conference Fund

The Economics Conference Fund⁴ had its first presentation as a body of trustees representing accounts held in four different countries – D’Arcy Mackenzie for Canada, Christopher Houghton Budd for the UK, Kim Chotzen for the USA, Lucia Sigolo for Brazil. Additionally, Stephen Vallus from Arkansas, USA has undertaken to consolidate the worldwide bookkeeping spreadsheet in Quickbooks. The process is guided by an image of accounting as one global currency. As a case study, we also wondered if the Economics Conference Fund might represent a way to organize the funding of any Section activity.

Last year the Swiss Anthroposophical Society, via the Goetheanum Fund⁵ newspaper supplement on economics research, generated 120,000 CHF from 3,000 people to further Steiner’s economic ideas. After costs for the publication were covered, 50% stayed with the Swiss Society and 50% – 50,000 CHF – went into the Economics Conference Fund. There was discussion as to its most effective and hygienic use and management.

It was agreed that the Economics Conference Fund would finance the next day’s research workshop, *Associative Economics in Secondary School Curricula*, as a way of demonstrating both the fidelity of those who have worked on this theme for all these years and the good will generated via the Goetheanum Fund on behalf of this work.

Music and Poetry

Kim Chotzen and Meg Freeling joined forces in an effort to consider music in the context of the evolution of economics. Kim led us in singing, highlighting themes that relate to the associative economics work as it has developed over the years. Meg gave us preliminary insights into her research on the question: What emerged in the Renaissance in music that ran parallel to Luca Pacioli’s double-entry bookkeeping in business and perspective drawing in art? All these disciplines reflected an historical shift in consciousness – and in music, this showed up as a new emphasis on the interval of the third. We experimented with capturing this shift by singing songs that had been chosen from that period. One of the musical highlights for many in our music making together was the procession down the central stairs into the stairwell of the College singing Mozart’s Halleluiah as a three-part round. The harmonies reverberated through the building and uplifted our souls.

⁴ Economics Conference Fund – A worldwide fund that aims to generate funding for research in via the accounts held within the Anthroposophical Society in countries around the world. See <http://economics.goetheanum.org/4712.html>

⁵ GoetheanumFund – A fund managed by a committee within the Anthroposophical Society in Switzerland for the purpose of giving the public at large an opportunity to support dedicated anthroposophical research. See <http://www.fondsgoetheanum.ch/en/goetheanumfund/about-us.html>

France Beaucage led us in a playful process of poetic expression whereby we created several group poems out of words depicting the essence of our individual hopes for our work. Below is one example:

Second Chance

An aligned, flexible avant-garde
Spirit-yeast: healer of world destiny
Steiner's hope: gentle courage
Love-economics: emancipation of future world
Beyond think-tank: Section
Listening is existential possibility
Collegiality sparks second chance

St. John's Day

The last day included an honoring of Saint John's Day, with an insightful historical perspective on Quebec's relationship to St. John offered by our gracious and capable organizer, France Beaucage. We considered as a gesture 'throwing into the fire' the word 'cheaper' as we go into the world striving toward true price. Anita suggested that every day we think, "Today, I'm going to meet a need, not earn money." She explained that, in the way of the Rosicrucians, we can transform substance and ourselves by practicing every day. On the evening of June 24th, we were invited by the Montreal Branch of the Anthroposophical Society to a shared event in celebration of St. John's Tide.

What are our next steps? The dates for the 14th Annual Economics Conference Meeting in Montreal are set for 24–28 June 2015. Preparing for next year, we will continue to look at the hindrances to true price, including egoism and collateralized lending. And we will begin to study the economic process itself as Steiner described it – including the principle that one cannot *store* but must *use* money.

Marc closed the event by noting that the "harmony we experience is possible because we have studied and been on the same focus: true price. We are in the same spiritual place. This is the beginning of a hope for the future because we now know we are not alone."

Financial literacy

Following the Economics Conference meeting proper, there was a one-day focus on financial literacy in schools, particularly on double-entry bookkeeping. Presentations included: "Accounting in a Nutshell" by Daniel Osmer, Christopher Houghton Budd's heuristic teaching approach used with two Waldorf Schools in Sao Paulo, Brazil and Mannheim, Germany along with strategies for integrating economics into existing curricula; and, by request, Marc Desaulles' spontaneous teach-in of how to present

double-entry bookkeeping to 12 year olds. Emphasis was placed on the value of financial literacy as a metaphor, such as the very word 'balance' in balance sheet and the T-Account as a symbol of uprightness.