



Overcoming Separateness in Economic Life

Finding a Common Approach to Economics

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The meeting was held on April 17, 2005 in Stroud, England. This was the first of its kind in the United Kingdom.

Building on an introduction to the Economics Conference in London last year, the first actual meeting of the conference in this country took place in Stroud on Sunday 17th April from 10.30am to 4.30pm. By providing a home for economics within the School of Spiritual Science, the Conference aims to create an opportunity to meet for those concerned with the development of a spiritual scientific approach to economics, business and finance. A fuller introduction to the work of the Economics Conference (including its conditions of participation) can be found on the website www.economics.goetheanum.org/home/

It was possible in the context of this meeting to find common ground in elaborating an approach to economics that does not rest on the materialism of contemporary thought and practice but has its origin in the insights of spiritual science. This in itself speaks volumes: the discipline of economics is plagued with forms of thinking that do nothing to further a practical grasp of the many pressing issues which society now faces, but that more often set opinions against one another. Only an economics born of a descriptive methodology has the potential to move current debate on and thereby effect real development. Thus, our intention is not to issue great policy pronouncements but to work together to create a cradle for the insights that we can individually take back into our professional activity in the world.

The significance of meeting is that it provides a means of overcoming separateness in our relationship to economic life. As anthroposophists, we were able to arrive at a perspective that we could share and own together, but to which no one of us alone could lay claim. Furthermore, by meeting we unfold the potential of a coherent, shared approach, a growing synthesis that can enhance a feeling for our joint responsibility in continuing to work in Rudolf Steiner's name.

In the morning, a wide variety of themes were covered, mostly those that had arisen out of individual experience of 'doing economics', such as zero-sum money, economics as case study, and the limitations of predictive modeling. A main theme of the afternoon was learning to allow the future to speak and thereby give rise to a Michaelic will. To do this means to be conscious of and thereby thwart the Ahrimanic challenge that is implicit when one moves in an abstract realm. Insofar as it is built out of the activity of free human beings, the School of Spiritual Science enables this challenge to be met, thus denying Ahriman a hold. This key fact enables us to recognise and overcome abstraction in economics, contributing thereby to a more truly scientific economics that humanity needs today.

An example, which we then focused on, was how economics might be taught in schools. In the first instance, this was addressed in terms of the Waldorf School Curriculum, but a wider question was put when we considered what the implications would be for society generally were a curriculum for economics, business and finance developed on a spiritual scientific basis. The goal of such a module would be to develop a way of teaching economics that not only met today's robust legislative requirements (e.g.

government inspectors), but also better equipped youngsters to face life; for example, by teaching financial literacy especially through the medium of practical projects. Such an approach would not only give economics historical and social grounding, but would go a long way to helping young people find their feet in life.