



# **True Price in Thought and Deed**

## Understanding Rudolf Steiner's True Price Formula

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## Understanding Rudolf Steiner's True Price Formula

*Symposium held at the Goetheanum, Dornach, Switzerland / 29 and 30 November 2013. Attended by 16 people from Europe with 6 apologies, several from the US, the symposium was one of a series planned for 2013/4 to focus on Rudolf Steiner's true price formula:*

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

*– Rudolf Steiner, 29 July 1922*

The symposium was held at the Goetheanum, near Basel, Switzerland. It opened with a talk by Marc Desaulles (transcript at <http://economics.goetheanum.org/literature/>), which led us from the antecedents of true price in Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas into a careful tracking of the logic of Steiner's presentations in his 1922 economics course. Price is the focus of all schools of economic thought. The difference with Steiner is that he focuses first on the conditions that give rise to price, as these may in fact falsify prices and thereby give us wrong information, wrong signals. Only then can we proceed to true prices and Rudolf Steiner's "nonetheless exhaustive" formula. All this with the proviso that it is meaningless to think of true price in an economy where real credit (lending against the collateral of objects, whether land, mortgage, or a car, leasing) crowds out or prevents personal credit (lending direct to the person).

We began our discussions in the modern setting of a studio high up in the Goetheanum, but the next day, after a rich round of introductions, transferred to a more intimate room in the old carpentry building behind. This gave us a taste of how it might have been when the original lectures were given, although enquiries are being made as to whether they were actually given there, and also who took part and why, and if anything is known of what they did with what they learned.

The second morning session was based on prepared or solicited contributions that gave a good sense of the various ways in which true price is being furthered in different parts of the world, whether conceptually or practically – not, of course that one can make such a sharp distinction in associative economics!

First, Marc Theurillat from Basel – an entrepreneur with considerable business experience in Switzerland – shared five main insights concerning prices, sustainability and Christianity. Then John Hogervorst from Holland described the challenges of publishing in today's environment and also the set-up by means of which his business (and others) are capitalised. Time, and the fact that we agreed to stay 'on topic' did not permit detailed pursuit of this vital and interesting subject.

Next, Ro Naastepad, a Dutch economist, spoke of her gradual steps in academia to introduce true price (and other ideas from Rudolf Steiner) in a way that bridges to current thinking such that the new paradigm enables us to slough off the old and not to be subsumed into it. (Rudolf Steiner, for example, warns that when good blood enters a sick organism, it does not make the sick organism better, but becomes sick itself.)

Christopher Houghton Budd presented two examples on behalf of colleagues who could not be present. (1) Xavier Andrillon in Brazil who has had a doctoral proposal accepted: In link with accounting, can Rudolf Steiner's idea of true price help companies to act more sustainably? This is one of a growing number of theses being pursued in universities around the world. (2) Meg Freeling's project in Columbus, Ohio, USA, where she is working with a local store to help them understand their work in the light of true price: How can true price help develop an associative way of doing business? See <http://wp.me/p6fhR-51K> and <http://economics.goetheanum.org/literature/>.

Josiana Arripol closed the session with a question about how we address such prevalent notions and policies as 'externalities'. Here the challenge we face is to return to 1922, take Rudolf Steiner seriously and then rerun history forward to envisage how things might have been or might yet become; then to assess how we displace the contrary paradigm currently prevailing.

The morning closed by identifying some themes and examples from our deliberations thus far, which we could focus on in the afternoon. The resulting list was as follows:

<i>Themes</i>	<i>Examples</i>
How do we know we are paying true prices?	Book pricing
Does the source/kind of money used to buy something matter?	Vegetable pricing
Hypothesising	Services pricing
Teaching what in economics in school?	Teachers' pay

Recorded highlights from that discussion included:

- 1) The need to be clear that Rudolf Steiner always begins on the side of production – not production of things as such, but the needs of the producers.
- 2) To further this we need something like a True Price Watch – see *Associate!* September 2013, Getting Traction.
- 3) The importance of always seeing prices as indicators, not as something to be targeted directly.
- 4) It is crucial to effect change at the level of macro thinking and macro policy.
- 5) Associative economics is neither conceivable nor implementable outside the frame of reference of the threefold nature of social life (however we understand that).
- 6) The role of Goethe, albeit updated and bridged to the English mind through the understanding of hypothesis as poetry, thereby finding a link to the otherwise non-hypothesising method of Steiner, spiritual science and, ergo, economic science. Mention was made of 'Goethe and Money', Freies Deutsches Hochstift, Frankfurt 2012.
- 7) Being clear about epistemology. For example, is it phenomenology or symptomatology that is key?

- 8) The need to understand what a science looks like that is both theoretical and practical (as, per Rudolf Steiner, is the case with economics).
- 9) The challenge for economic actors, whether producers, distributors or consumers, when coming together to consider price to do so as economists, not out of their 'interests', even though these give the necessary ground of experience for meaningful associative working.

The closing session began at the practical end of things, with the case of book publishing and related financing problems. Several participants were directly concerned with this topic, which used to be a focus in the time of Manfred Schmidt-Brabant and which continues to be critical for anthroposophical publishers and booksellers worldwide.

The exchange afforded a good opportunity to use the discussion of actual practical problems to help us understand price and associated matters conceptually. Maybe this is part of a theoretical and practical science?

Throughout, the meeting was permeated by a wonderful spirit of research and there was a welcome absence of polemic, notwithstanding that both participants and contributions evinced a rich variety of experience and perspective.

The event was without charge but gifts for the Goetheanum were requested. The result was 480 CHF + 50 EUR.