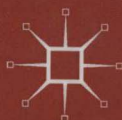


Perspectives from Social Economics

ALTERNATIVE PERSPECTIVES OF A GOOD SOCIETY

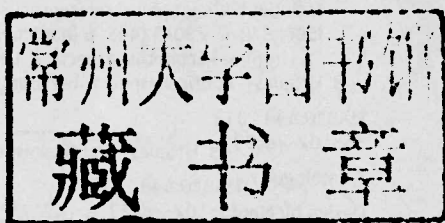
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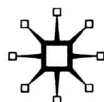
Alternative Perspectives of a Good Society

Edited by

John Marangos



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ALTERNATIVE PERSPECTIVES OF A GOOD SOCIETY

PERSPECTIVES FROM SOCIAL ECONOMICS

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Mark D. White, Professor in the Department of Political Science, Economics, and Philosophy at the College of Staten Island/CUNY

The Perspectives from Social Economics series incorporates an explicit ethical component into contemporary economic discussion of important policy and social issues, drawing on the approaches used by social economists around the world. It also allows social economists to develop their own frameworks and paradigms by exploring the philosophy and methodology of social economics in relation to orthodox and other heterodox approaches to economics. By furthering these goals, this series will expose a wider readership to the scholarship produced by social economists, and thereby promote the more inclusive viewpoints, especially as they concern ethical analyses of economic issues and methods.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

John Marangos

This book is the result of a joint session of AFEE (Association for Evolutionary Economics) and ASE (Association for Social Economics) at the 2010 ASSA (Allied Social Science Association) meeting in Atlanta. I had the opportunity to preside over the session and also make a presentation; the other presenters included Janet Knoedler and Geoffrey Schneider of Bucknell University, Al Campbell of the University of Utah, Nikos Astroulakis from the University of Crete, Greece, and Ellen Mutari of Richard Stockton College of New Jersey, who took part as a discussant. The session was very successful with an attendance of around 60 people. After the presentations, a lively discussion took place. The success of the session inspired the idea for a collection of articles with the same theme in the form of a book. An open call for contributions was made widely, and the following chapters were accepted for inclusion in this book.

While all the authors included in their chapters aspects of the good society, implicitly the book is structured around four core themes: alternative societies, alternative methodologies, alternative policies, and alternative assessments. The book offers a collection of chapters by internationally renowned authors in the field of heterodox economics on their views of a good society, rather than an outline of any specific author. Different authors answer different questions, all within the context of visions of a good society. The advantage of this approach is that the authors with specialized knowledge and skills on a particular issue/issues about a good society are able to offer a variety of heterodox approaches. In this way, readers get the opportunity to familiarize themselves with different perceptions, which provide the opportunity to accept or dismiss the different arguments. The goal of the book is to offer alternative views on societies, methodologies,

and policies, and assessment of the current and future elements of society.

Al Campbell opens the book with chapter 2 on "Marx and Engels's Vision of Building a Good Society." The author stipulates that contrary to a popular misconception among many people who have not read much of what Marx and Engels actually wrote, they did have many general ideas about the nature of the better society that would eventually replace capitalism. These general ideas rested above all on two central components of their worldview. The first was that all reality is dialectical, a process of unending changes. The second component was their view of human nature. Marx and Engels indeed opposed the sort of detailed specification of a good society proposed by the utopians of their times, such as Owen, Fourier, and Saint-Simon. This opposition came from their identical understanding of reality. Since many contradictions could be resolved in many different ways, history was not predetermined by this process of negation, but rather through a contingent and open process. Marx and Engels saw a postcapitalist society as collective, democratic, absent of the creation of commodities (value) in production, absent of private property in the means of production, consciously socially planned, and (in a sense) egalitarian. In its first phase, socialism, the postcapitalist society would still rest on the bourgeois concept of right, justice or fairness, and the exchange of equivalents, even after commodities and private property in the means of production cease to exist. In the subsequent communist phase, the defining characteristic would be the transcending of this concept of right, justice, or fairness, with the principle of need-based provisioning.

The subsequent chapter, chapter 3 by Karin Schönpflug, "Gendered Work in a 'Good Society'—A Paradox to Care About," juxtaposes the current system of mainstream economics, which can be interpreted as a "bad society." The focus of mainstream economics on the maximization of utility of individuals within hierarchically gendered family structures produces the paradox in labor markets and care realms. Caring labor is a paradox since concepts of care and self-interest are conflicting motivations of economic agents. This results in an ambivalence that is resolved by the introduction of different internalized character attributes of biological markers such as skin color or gender differences, producing privileges for a certain group of economic agents. The concept of a "performative circle" helps to explain the difficulty of addressing systemic correction of discrimination and inequality (visible in gaps in pay or unequal working hours) without undoing gender and other cultural norms on symbolic, institutional,

and personal levels. Alternatives in feminist utopian writing are presented as they point toward a change in economics paradigm that may provide an end to the care paradox that is embedded in an arrangement of gendered separate spheres. It involves a redesigning of education structures, labor market organization, language, technology, architecture, and reception of age, race, class, and gender.

In chapter 4, "Does the Field of Comparative Economic Systems (CES) Care about the Good Society? A Feminist Angle on the Need for Institutional Analysis in CES," by Lynn S. Duggan and Barbara E. Hopkins, the field of Comparative Economic Systems (CES) is examined to gauge its progress in analyzing and comparing systems that include gendered processes. Historically, economic debates over the form of "the good society" have focused on alternative modes of production and have not analyzed the gendering of economies, ignoring the processes whereby households convert formal production into consumable goods and services to provide for the needs of societies. The authors begin with a brief history of the evolution of CES, noting limitations due to its methodologies and focus and discussing the relationship between these limitations and the lack of gender analysis in this field. The authors offer an alternative, Comparative Gendered Economic System (CGES), and provide suggestions as to where scholarship that contributes to such gendered understandings of CES may presently be found. The authors state that three changes to CES are needed to further develop CGES. First, the traditional CES emphasis on state versus private ownership should be replaced with a focus on the differential impacts of economic structures on men and women. Second, the primary focus of analysis should be households as institutions, including gendered divisions of labor, investments in education and skill building, and distributions of consumption and decision making. Third, CGES should emphasize equity as the primary outcome used to evaluate an economic system. In conclusion, the authors argue that these changes will produce a CGES analysis that will provide answers that are more relevant, than traditional CES frameworks, to questions of "what is the good society?"

Following this, chapter 5 by John Marangos and Nikos Astroulakis, titled "The Development Ethics Perspective of a Good Society," questions the mainstream economics perspective of a good society. In mainstream economics, a good society is defined by the amount of savings that leads to investments and to the growth of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), by the increase in material consumption in terms of economic well-being, and by the maximization of individual's utility. In contrast, development ethics answers questions about the good