

Grab the Future

**Grieve for the History that Might Have been.
Grasp the Future that still Could Be**

**Fred Harrison
reflects on his
New Year Mission Statement**

“I have read with interest your work. I believe it contains different topics. Some describe what Hegel would call the “objective spirit” or “spirit of the people” (Volkgeist). This “spirit” would be responsible for the typical story of every people. Acknowledging the uniqueness of each society is very important. Georgists generally intend to apply the same theory to all people equally. This is an obstacle to the principles of George to become a reality on the facts of social life.”

Dr. Héctor Sandler (Buenos Aires)

Trauma and Ideology Constructive responses to my New Year’s Mission Statement stressed the need to help people visualise a new pathway into the future. I was challenged by colleagues in Denmark to be specific about how others might participate. Before I get specific, we must address some of the philosophical issues that the advocates of competing doctrinal faiths put to me.

Psychologist C.G. Jung applied the concept of “wholeness”, or completeness, to the psychological health of the individual. This is a state in which trauma is diminished through therapy. We need to develop that concept and apply it to society. Georgism is not the pathway to utopia. Taking our communities as they are, it is possible to remove the pathologies that are artificial (“unnatural”), and which can be carefully excised. Our mission is one of healing – and rebuilding – our societies.

The Georgist movement includes activists who are Socialists, Libertarians, Nationalists, Liberals (in the UK sense) as well as Conservatives. I suspect that there are even a couple of Anarchists in the ranks! They all “see” how their favoured philosophical orientations would be *recalibrated* if the proponents of their favoured philosophies were to factor the Georgist land value tax into their theoretical frameworks. They understand that such a modification would transform those doctrines in significant ways.

We preserved the solidarity of our Georgist fraternity over the past century by not challenging the features of the philosophies which do not sit square with Henry George’s vision of the free society. United, we can take on the world; but, first, we do need to reflect on how we accommodate the competing world-views. For example -

- Fred Foldvary believes that, if LVT were added to Libertarianism, we would move towards the society of freedom that Henry George championed.
- Dave Wetzel believes that, if LVT were added to Socialism, we would...ditto.
- Ron Banks believes that, if LVT were added to UK Liberalism, we would...ditto.

I call these “filler” philosophies. They are the products of *minds that have been traumatised by the savage assault on people’s psyches, and society’s collective consciousness, by the brutalities of land privatisation.*

Filler Philosophies Labelling these world-views as *filler philosophies* sounds offensive. So I must emphasise: each offers important insights into our human condition, and each offers signposts to a future fit for humanity. When we re-evaluate what happened over the last 400 years, we reach two conclusions (which are inspired by what historians call *counterfactual* history).

- If European civilisation had not been grounded in the private land tenure model, *Europe’s nations would have traversed radically different pathways to modernity.* Those pathways would have been guided by a social philosophy which (for want of a better word) we could call “natural philosophy”.
- Because Europe’s populations were moulded by a civilisation that was structured on the brutal taking of the lands of “common people”, *traumatised populations had to respond philosophically in ways that corresponded to their particular circumstances.* Those responses included Marxism; Fascism; Libertarianism; Anarchism, and so on (I begin to discuss the problem of trauma, as applied to society, in *The Predator Culture*).

These philosophies *filled the voids created by the absence of natural philosophy.* They were the intellectual responses of people of varying personalities who were affected by their particular times and places. Karl Marx might have been a Libertarian, if he had been born to immigrant parents in New York. Adolf Hitler might have been a Marxist, if he had been born to immigrant parents in Tsarist Russia. Who knows? Different times and habitats *provoked responses that corresponded to the traumatic social and economic conditions that were created by the absence of the natural paradigm.*

The Great Synthesis The philosophical challenge is to perceive how the filler philosophies would adjust, if the Georgist paradigm were germinated within them. *A full tax shift of the Georgist kind would necessarily modify the central tenets of all these faiths,* in ways that their non-Georgist proponents could not currently comprehend. That’s the problem. At present, those people, most of them good-at-heart, cannot see why they should re-interpret their belief systems in relation to the 100% LVT/fiscal reform model.

One of our tasks, therefore, is to:

- help supporters of all philosophical strands to realise that *they cannot achieve their goals without the 100% collection of land rents.*

- enable people to understand that the current model of land tenure is morally unacceptable. Once they realise this, *many would automatically adjust some of the principles of their faiths to make space in their minds for Georgist tenets.*

If this were to happen, we may predict the following:

- the hard individualistic edge of Libertarianism would be softened;
- the hard collectivistic edge of Marxism would be softened....and,
- ultimately, there would be a synthesis of the filler philosophies in favour of a coherent strategy for social change and personal freedom.

We cannot anticipate the detail of how the new ways of viewing the world would evolve over the next 50 years in response to rapidly changing social and personal circumstances. Each society needs to adjust, based on its national temperament, history, ecology and traditions. But we do need to affirm the tenets that are non-negotiable: *nature's resources, and society's creative energy, are shared resources, and we are all entitled to an equal share of those values.*

Diagnostic tools Modern Europe was born by a brutal form of Caesarean section. It was the traumatic event that now afflicts the collective consciousness not just of Europe and North America, but the whole world. The peoples of the commons were plundered and gouged of their birthrights.

To elaborate a coherent strategy for correcting this tragedy, we need tools that provide a comparative analysis of the nature of all the problems that threaten peace and prosperity in the 21st century. Policy analysts who influence politicians and opinion-makers need to be convinced that there is a reliable science behind our transformative strategy. So there is still much book-learning homework to be done.

I believe that shock therapy is needed as the first step towards arresting people's attention. Psychologists employ the American Psychiatric Association's diagnostic manual (called: DSM-III-R). The social sciences need something similar: a set of diagnostic tools to enable analysts to draw robust conclusions about the state of health of society. We must elaborate such a diagnostic framework, to lure academics away from the barricades that ring their disciplines. We must provide overwhelming evidence and arguments to show that the civilisation grounded in the European model is so dysfunctional that it is collapsing under the stresses generated by its own pathological principles.

The Georgist movement could make a significant difference to the way events evolve in the 21st century. I believe that the future of humanity is at stake. Practical action must meet two tests: initiatives must be *proportionate* to the scale of the problems, and they must be of the kind that *could* succeed *in principle*. These considerations will be the subject of further reflection.

February 7, 2011