

A CRITIQUE OF CAPITALIST WEALTH

**Henry Mora Jiménez
Universidad Nacional, Costa Rica.
Grupo de Trabajo FES-Transformación.**

WEALTH

(Guiding questions)

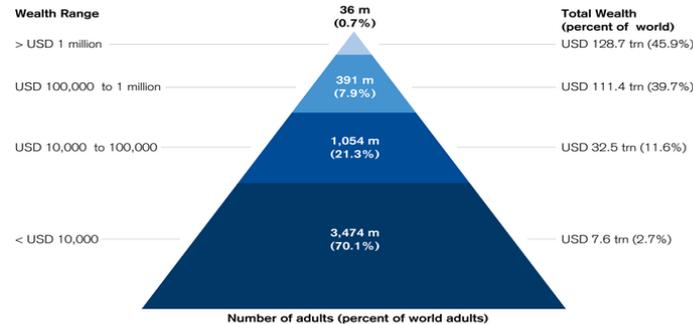
1. How can we radically reduce the economic ties among people, the sweeping dependency on markets and the concentration of wealth?
2. How can we escape from the dominant concepts of poverty and wealth that prevail in a Growth Society where Science and Technology are drivers?
3. How can we create a Society that radically reduces the dominance by Economy and Technology and instead save the Natural and Cultural richness of the world?
4. How can we defend and increase the biological and cultural diversity that the Economy and Technology destroy every day: clean oceans and rivers, the beauty of the landscapes, the free relationships face to face, friendship, collaboration, solidarity, communal living, contemplation, human rhythm and human scale?
5. How can we eliminate the wealth that forms the basis of the destruction of the life on Earth?

I HOW CAN WE RADICALLY REDUCE THE ECONOMIC TIES BETWEEN PEOPLE, THE SWEEPING DEPENDENCY ON MARKETS AND THE CONCENTRATION OF WEALTH?

1.1 Economic ties between people (asymmetric dependence and domination relations).

1.2 The great dependence of the markets.

1.3 The concentration of capitalist wealth («material wealth»)



1.1 Economic ties between people (asymmetric dependence and domination relations)

- We live and coexist in **interdependence** and **ecodependence** ("objective laws" based on the social division of labor).
- The problem is not the social division of labor itself, but social interdependence under **coactive division of labor**.

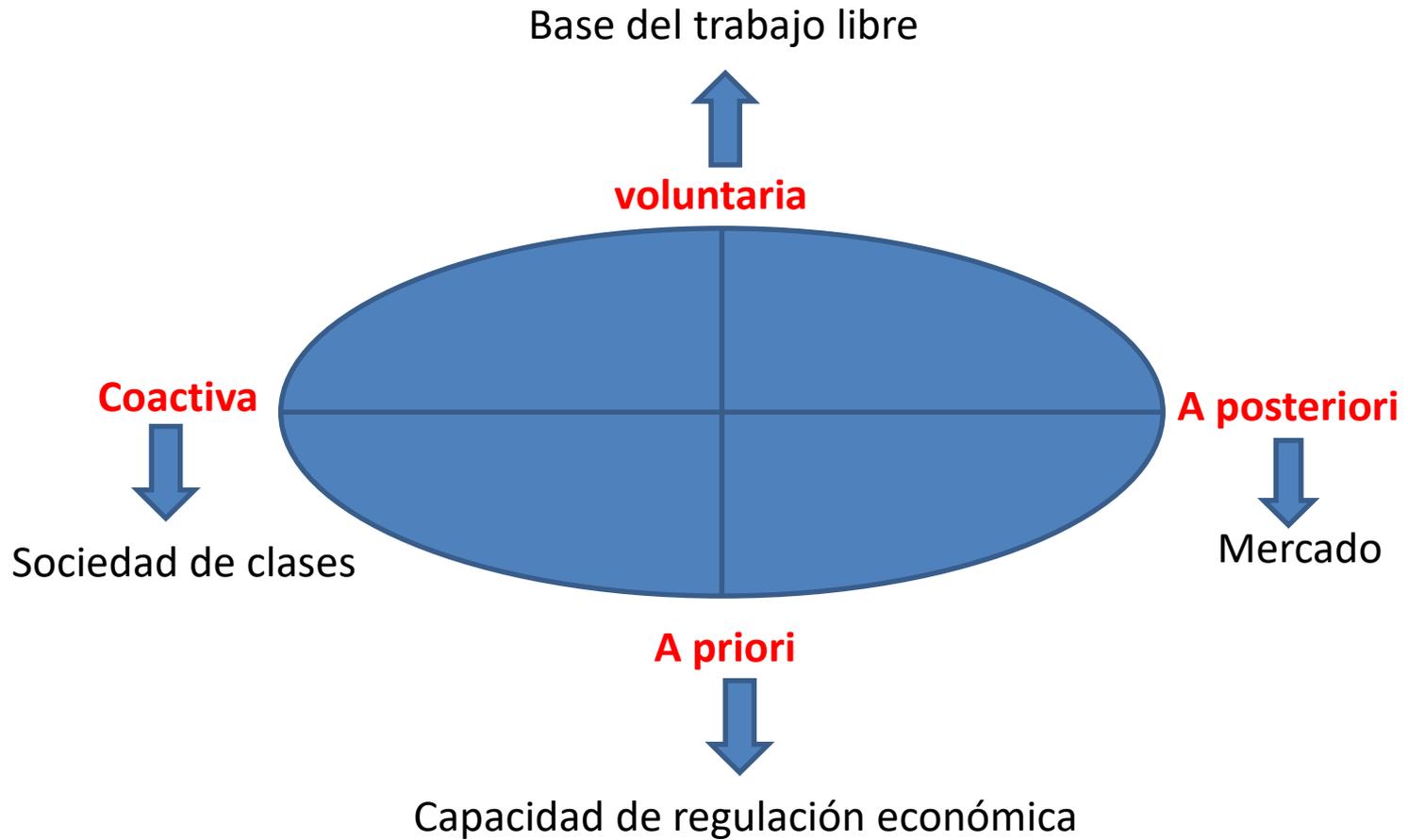


- **Capitalism**: the social division of labor is **coactive** and *a posteriori* (**root of the alienation, asymmetric dependence and domination relations**).
- **How to face coactive and a posteriori coordination?:** with more **voluntary** and more *a priori* coordination.

.... Economic ties between people (asymmetric dependence and domination relations)

- ❖ **More voluntary coordination:** companies and organizations of sharing, social and solidarity economy; **basic income** => stimulating labor multifunctionality and labor movility (“Free Labour”)
- ❖ **More a priori coordination:** macroeconomic planning of the economy (as a whole), effective planning of the social and economic functions of the state.
- ❖ **Less coercive coordination:** plurality in the forms of ownership and democratization of the management of public and private companies.
- ❖ **Less a posteriori coordination:** regulations, interventions, limitations and prohibitions to the free action of the markets (whenever it is necessary).

A GENERAL RULE (LIMIT): no defense or affirmation of the "free market" (or of another macro-social institution) can impede the satisfaction of the basic needs for all people, or destroy material bases of life reproduction.



Formas de Coordinación del Trabajo Social

1.2 The great dependence of the markets

Different levels of intervention on the markets: from simple general regulations (labor and environmental) to the radical prohibition.

The problem is not the market per se, but the unbridled market, self-de-regulated, without limits: **the total market.**

Polanyi: three crucial areas to put limits ("re-embed") the market: Labor, Land, Money.



Socialize, "ecologize" and "feminize" the markets!

To intervene market relations wherever their destructive tendencies are especially complex, automatic or irreversible.

1.3 The concentration of capitalist wealth (material wealth)

Concentration: a "law of tendency" of capitalism: as such, compulsive but not absolutely inevitable \Leftrightarrow Coactive and a posteriori coordination of labor.

Capitalist society: creation of material wealth through the accumulation of capital, a society oriented towards the valorization value of money.

Other forms of concentration of wealth by:

dispossession (against peasants, indigenous people, traditional knowledge), pillage of public and common property, corruption, tax evasion, "incentives", corporatization of the state,

debt money (unproductive capital), etc.



What actions can be taken?

Democratizing and socializing property

(communal, public,
even private property but
not "privative" property)



Actions, policies: strongly progressive taxation, credit democratization, limits on the use and ownership of land, effective anti-monopoly laws, the best possible education for all people, basic citizen income, decent and guaranteed minimum wage, limits on high wages and benefits (public and private), etc.

2. How can we escape from the dominant concepts of poverty and wealth that prevail in a Growth Society where Science and Technology are the drivers?

2.1 Wealth and poverty: dominant concepts

2.2 Science and technology as drivers of the growth society

2.3 How to escape from the dominant concepts of poverty and wealth?

2.1 Wealth and poverty: dominant concepts

- i) **Expand the concept of wealth (plenitude).** The way in which we conceptualize and measure both wealth and poverty determine our horizon of vision and our frameworks of action and policies. Wealth and poverty are not, in principle, only "situations", but social behaviors and orientations of action.

- ii) **Expand the concept of wealth in three senses:** a) as wealth not only material: wealth of time and relational wealth, b) conceiving wealth as social behavior, and, c) not reducing material wealth to capitalist wealth (accumulation), but also seeing wealth as enjoyment of consumption and sharing and caring for available resources.

2.1 Wealth and poverty: dominant concepts

i) Expand the concept of wealth (plenitude). The way in which we conceptualize and measure both wealth and poverty determine our horizon of vision and our frameworks of action and policies.

ii) Wealth and poverty are not, in principle, only "situations", but social behaviors and orientations of action.

iii) Expand the concept of wealth in three senses: a) as wealth not only material: **wealth of time and relational wealth**, b) conceiving wealth as social behavior, and, c) not reducing material wealth to capitalist wealth (accumulation), but also seeing wealth as **enjoyment of consumption and sharing and caring for available resources.**

Wealth and poverty: dominant concepts

iv) The very concept of material wealth and its relation to "production" is problematic.

Production of new wealth is assimilated to the "product produced" ignoring the destructive effects on the human Being and natural environment



v) The capitalist economic calculation (scarcity calculus) is basically a "pirate calculation". Only the product produced is counted, not the potential product destroyed.

2.2 Science and technology as drivers of the growth society

Four problems to consider:

i) Science and technology in themselves do not drive the growth society,

but, the capitalist and patriarchal appropriation and subsumption.

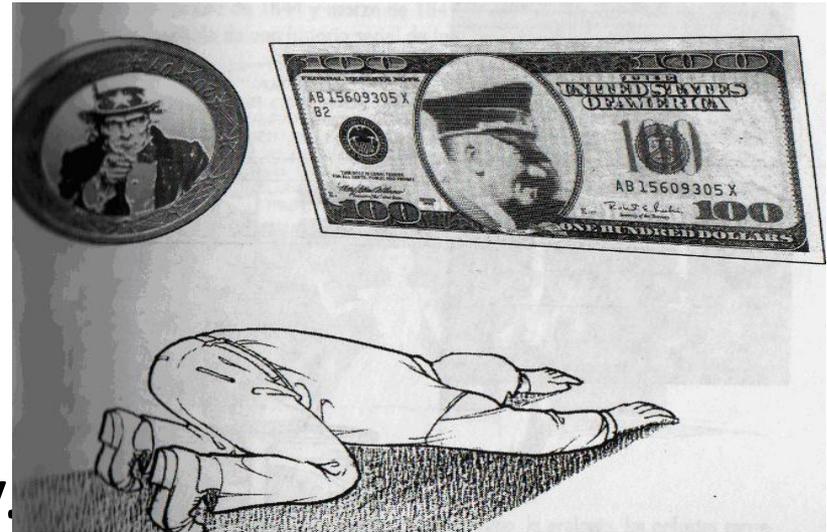


ii) The fundamental problem: the fragmentary use of technology.

Science and technology as drivers of the growth society

iii) **A transcendental illusion:** the infinite approximation

to ideal concepts are categorically possible "in principle", through the development *ad infinitum* of technology.



iv) **Fetishism of money:** what money seeks to buy seems infinite, ignoring the reproduction of the material conditions of production.

2.3 How to escape from the dominant concepts of poverty and wealth?

- i) **Expand wealth concept:** a) wealth material, b) wealth of time, c) relational wealth (Manfred Linz) and its criteria of orientation (a relational / structural conception of wealth).
- ii) **The starting point: Face society of growth!** Perform their theoretical criticism and promote changes in the corresponding social behaviors (orientation criteria) and in the "structural conditions" (social relations of production).
- iii) **Consumerism destroys enjoyment** (Lacan). Wealth is understood not only as consumer power, but also and fundamentally, as a consumption increasingly disconnected from the satisfaction of needs, becoming a cult of consumption by consumption itself (consumerism).

... How to escape from the dominant concepts of poverty and wealth?

- i) **Poverty is much more than "lack of things"** (consumer society). Poverty is not only the impossibility of satisfying needs, but also feeling and enjoying them.
- ii) **Self-containment in rush consumption is certainly necessary**, but this can not be done without the **rediscovery of enjoyment**.
- iii) **Fundamental condition**: guarantee the security of all the people to a decent existence, product of labor (contribution) of each one (changing the social relations of production).
- iv) **A reified conception of poverty comes from contempt for corporality and sensuality** (Augustine). Poverty is dehumanization, mutilation of human dignity.
- v) **We must rediscover the enjoyment and taking pleasure in consumption**. Paradoxically, when enjoyment disappear, desire and even the need to consume tends to be infinite.

III How can we create a society that radically reduces the dominance by economy and technology and, instead, save the Natural and Cultural richness of the world?

3.1 A society that reduces the dominance of the economy

3.2 A society that dominates technology

3.3 Saving Natural and Cultural richness

3.1 A society that reduces the dominance of the economy

i) We can start from Karl Polanyi

Three areas of the life system that should be excluded from privatization and commodification: 1) the "labor", 2) the "land" and 3) the "money" (ergo: the human being, nature and the main means of coordination of social labor in a mercantile economy).

To these three exclusions suggested by Polanyi, we must urgently add at least one more: the **use of science and technology**, especially when it seeks to transform the very molecular structure of human and non-human life (biotechnology, genetic engineering).

ii) We must expand Polanyi's arguments in terms of An Economy for Life:

"The system of property, the forms of economic calculation, the norms of distribution of the product, the patterns of consumption and even the current values, that is, the institutions of the economy, must derive themselves from the fundamental and unavoidable principle of the affirmation of life, and therefore, they can not be contrary to the preservation and development of the material conditions (socio-institutional and biophysical) that allow the social reproduction of real".

3.2 A society that dominates technology.

A basic point: Technology itself does not create such tendencies of domination, but its transformation into capital.

i) The first thing: to face the technological myth. (technological development is interpreted as an approach to infinity that takes an infinite image as a realistic objective (perfect societies)).

ii) This myth leads to the reduction of human action to its technological aspect.

⇒ foundation of **mystification of growth**

⇒ Bases of human life are destroyed.

iii) Move from subsumption (formal and real) of science and technology (conceptual labor in general) to democratic-ethical control of science.

3.3 Saving natural and cultural wealth of the world

The land (and water) is a good over which there should be no property in the sense of "dominium" (rights of use instead).

Culture: fight at a global level the dangers that come from the privatization and liberalization promoted by the WTO.



The **preservation of biodiversity and cultural diversity** are the two major social movements of the 21st century (Rifkin).

The long-term goal can only be to **reverse capitalist development**

IV How can we defend and increase the biological and cultural diversity that the economy and technology destroy every day

- **4.1 Understand, defend and increase biological and cultural diversity.**
- **4.2 Two lines of action...**
- **4.3 Recover the rhythm of the human being and the human scale.**

4.1 Understand, defend and increase biological and cultural diversity

❖ **Diversity is the basis of evolution.** The impoverishment of natural and cultural diversity limits the ability of the planet and humanity to respond to new and changing situations (climate change).

without diversity there is no evolution.

❖ **Fragmentary use of technology is the real threat,** but paradoxically, it is a fact inherent to the social division of labor. "Division" is at the same time "fragmentation".

What is at stake is the future of life!

4.2 Two lines of action

1- The systematic intervention of markets (based on the reproduction of human life).

We urgently need a theory of systematic market intervention
(intervention from the logic of the reproduction of life, not from the logic of the market)

2- A recomposition of the social labor coordination system:

2.1 To limit the coactive and "a posteriori" coordination (expansion of direct and voluntary relationships) and

2.2 Transform the **social relations of production** (expansion of communal property, of public spaces, democratization of ownership and management, **citizen control over all forms of domination**).

4.3 Recover the rhythm of the human being and the human scale.

Recognize the ongoing crisis as a global ecosocial crisis (perhaps even civilizing crisis), which forces, demands, rethink our relationship with nature and with ourselves, at least in the following aspects:

- 1-**Decrease** in the material sphere,
- 2-Accept the **planetary limits**,
- 3-Discourage **casino capitalism** (regulation of interest, decrease the weight of debt money, reverse the privatization of retirement systems),
- 4-**Guarantee the satisfaction** of the «ends of the common good» for all ("basic needs"),



Recover the rhythm of the human being and the human scale.

5-Expand the labor of care (care for the human being, care for nature, care for democracy, care for the common good) and the **distribution of labor.**



6-Recover the human scale of life: labor, consumption, recreation, sleep, direct relationships, etc.

7-Guide social relationships towards overcoming different forms of domination (social, gender, race, intergenerational, etc.)

8-Promote local alternatives and the **mobility of closeness.**

Regain the Meaning of Life

The meaning of life is to live it!

«I live if you live»

V How can we eliminate the wealth that forms the basis of the destruction of life on Earth?

- **5.1 We can not eliminate that form of wealth in a predictable horizon (capitalist wealth in all its extremes), but we can reduce it and control it, "as much as possible".**
- **5.2 What form of wealth creation destroys life on Earth?**

5.1 We can not eliminate that form of wealth in a predictable horizon (capitalist wealth in all its extremes), but we can reduce it and control it, "as much as possible".

❖ **Capitalist wealth**: expression of certain **social relations of production**: a) "a posteriori" and coercive coordination of social labor, b) means of production and life are capital and c) Labor-Power is Wage Labor, d) surplus-value is the source of all capitalist wealth.

❖ Urgent to **democratize the "powers of coordination" associated with private ownership**, even before attempting to control the consequent "powers of domination".

❖ Identify and subordinate the **criteria of orientation and social behaviors associated with capitalist wealth**: a) individualistic calculation of utility, b) instrumental rationality and c) the fetishism of commodity, money and capital, d) the consequent banalization of reality .



... 5.2 What form of wealth creation destroys life on Earth? How to eliminate the wealth that destroys the planet?

1. **Subordinating the instrumental rationality...**
2. **A new reproductive and coexistence rationality ...**
3. **In some cases general regulations...**
4. **In other cases, certain productions must simply be banned**
5. **A priority task is to reverse the privatization of life...**
6. **Promote inclusive consumption...** "On earth there is enough to meet the needs of all, but not enough to satisfy the greed of some" (Mahatma Gandhi).
7. **Clearly differentiate in social accounting between "production" and "extraction" ...**
8. **Gradually substitute market prices (extraction prices) for "reproduction prices".** This involves socializing, ecologizing and feminizing the markets.
9. **Reward work, not wealth (OXFAM)**
10. **Promote clear strategies of degrowth... (or transformation).**



Thank you very much