

What is happening and what to do about it

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- Robbins expresses the problems of globalization and capitalism as being due to...
 - capitalism's requirement (effect?) of perpetual growth
 - which we encourage by policies to increase GNP
 - GNP (Gross National Product) is total spending on everything
 - rising GNP is seen as good
 - governments, multilateral institutions, etc. all promote rising GNP
 - even though a lot of spending is in response to damages to environment, health, etc.
 - So, could we change this by using a different measure of success
 - such as one that measures quality of life?
- To raise GNPs of nations, we are using up global capital of all kinds
 - Environmental capital
 - forests, oil deposits, clean water, an atmosphere that does not heat the planet, etc.
 - capitalism converts environmental capital into money
 - Social capital
 - Social capital is the relationships that people have with each other that provide them with...
 - networks of reciprocity and mutual responsibility, thus:
 - access to material resources
 - social support and meaning
 - trust
 - In the course of part of making money, capitalism
 - alienates labor, destroying relationships related to production
 - makes laborers mobile, destroying neighbor and village relationships
 - breaks down kin networks into nuclear families, etc.
 - these are externalities: costs of production not borne by the producer or the purchaser
 - Political capital
 - Political capital is people's control over their own lives
 - politics is about exactly how we give up some of that control for various reasons
 - a little democracy is good for capitalism, but too much hinders it
 - people vote to restrict businesses
 - environmental regulations
 - working conditions, etc.
 - Capitalism consumes political capital by
 - using money to influence government policies
 - supporting authoritarian regimes that are favorable to business
 - concentrating power in large corporations, in which most people have no say in plant locations, firings, pollution, etc.
 - promoting pro-business but socially harmful policies via IMF, WTO, World Bank, which do not answer to the public
 - encouraging treaties like NAFTA that are enforced by un-elected bodies

- concentrating power of the media into a few large corporations
 - like Rupert Murdoch's Fox News
 - lots of political influence in the hands of a corporation, not the public
- again, these are externalities
 - costs to bystanders' political capital
- What can we do?
 - Robbins presents a bunch of ideas
 - each one would require another book to really examine
 - most would have complicated, hard-to-predict effects
 - but if we believe the status quo is bad enough, maybe we should risk some changes...
 - Use a different index of success
 - stop maximizing GNP
 - start maximizing HDI: Human Development Index
 - or GPI: Genuine Progress Indicator
 - Stop depleting natural capital, by
 - changing taxes to reward holding natural resources, rather than converting them to money
 - price non-renewable resources higher, so that renewable ones are preferred
 - include externality costs like pollution, global warming, etc. in prices
 - cap-and-trade systems, carbon taxes, etc.
 - impose greater costs on garbage and other waste
 - etc.
 - Stop depleting political capital, by
 - eliminating corporate personhood
 - limit corporate participation in politics (campaign finance reform, yet again)
 - disband the WTO, IMF, World Bank, etc.
 - etc.
 - Stop depleting social capital, by
 - encouraging local production and consumption
 - establishing social policy that allows families to live on one income
 - somehow pay for domestic work in the family comparably to the way we pay wage labor
 - maybe through tax laws?
 - etc.
 - (this strikes me as probably the hardest kind of capital to restore)
 - Robbins ends by suggesting that these changes will require huge efforts and changes
 - because people are already acculturated into consumerism and capitalism
 - why should people give up what they have?
 - it might take an irrational motivation
 - moral, spiritual, or religious belief in an intrinsic value of the planet, ecology, and other people
 - pure utilitarianism would encourage the path we are on now
 - or if not, it would not be enough to motivate the hard changes needed
 - “we will not fight for what we do not love”
 - what does he propose that we should love?

- the Earth and its biosphere
- other people, enough to really care about justice and feel compassion
- does that sound a little like religion?