

Introduction to Feasta website articles

I am a 54-year-old Canadian who lives near Vancouver with his partner, daughter, dog, and cat. For part of the year I travel and teach people about computers. For the rest of the time I think and write about economics.

My interest in economics arose from a speech by a Canadian environmentalist, David Suzuki, at a rally to save old-growth forests in British Columbia. Suzuki thundered his contempt for standard economics, charging it with narrowness and abstraction from nature. I didn't understand the subject well enough to assess his comments, so I decided to return to university to fill this significant gap.

At university I found the narrowness and abstraction Suzuki had mentioned, but I did learn economics and had another useful experience.

The professor in one of my classes was a conservative thinker with whom I sometimes debated economic issues after class. During one such debate I was vigorously defending a pet position when he cut me off and asked, "Where's your model?" That is: where's your theory - your graphs and equations?

The question annoyed me at the time, but it hit the mark. I realized that I had views, but no graphs; passions, but no equations; commitments, but no theory.

This was my loss of intellectual innocence. For the first time I fully appreciated that those who hold conventional views are bolstered by a set of sophisticated economic concepts, while those who take a critical stance must rely on a few scattered ideas and the fire in their bellies.

Since that humiliation I have tried to formulate an economic theory for those concerned about humanity and nature. Such a project is immense and clearly beyond one person's capacity, but my objective was to get things started.

My most basic assumption concerns the nature of standard economics. For me this is not a universal method of analysis, but instead represents the viewpoint of a specific class: capitalists. If we don't share their viewpoint, and if we are serious about doing independent economic analysis, then we have to rethink economic theory from the ground up.

Over the past decade I have studied numerous economists, from John Ruskin to Karl Marx, looking for ideas that could serve as the basis for such an alternative mode of thought. I have now reached some initial conclusions, and want to expose them to scrutiny and criticism. Lately I have been haunted by the words of John Maynard Keynes: "It is astonishing what foolish things one can temporarily believe if one thinks too long alone, particularly in economics ...".

My ideas will be presented on the Feasta website in four parts.

Part 1 will deal with preliminary issues which lay the groundwork for a human-oriented economic theory. I am keenly interested in your feedback on these basic ideas.

Part 2 will be a primer on economic analysis, covering such important concepts as marginal quantities, optimization, value, and cost. This is intended for people with no background in the subject.

Part 3 will introduce the terms and concepts of the human framework, which is one of the three components of my proposed theory.

Part 4 will complete the series by developing the analytical tools of the human framework and applying several of them to Richard Douthwaite's book *The Growth Illusion*.

The other two components of my theory are the functional and ecological frameworks. The first deals with the workings of capitalism, and the second with ecological limits and efficiency. I have not yet completed these, but will be pleased to offer them for publication on the website at a later date.

I am looking to the Feasta membership for informed, constructive criticism of my current ideas. It is my hope that, if these are properly developed, they will prove invaluable to those striving for a sustainable and more humane world.

Frank Rotering
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