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The Meaning of General Economy

The Dependence of the Economy on the Circulation of Energy on the Earth

When it is necessary to change an automobile tire, open an abcess or plow a vineyard, it is easy to manage a quite limited operation. The elements on which the action is brought to bear are not completely isolated from the rest of the world, but it is possible to act on them as if they were: One can complete the operation without once needing to consider the whole, of which the tire, the abcess or the vineyard is nevertheless an integral part. The changes brought about do not perceptibly alter the other things, nor does the ceaseless action from without have an appreciable effect on the conduct of the operation. But things are different when we consider a substantial economic activity such as the production of automobiles in the United States, or, *a fortiori*, when it is a question of economic activity in general.

Between the production of automobiles and the *general* movement of the economy, the interdependence is rather clear, but the economy taken as a whole is usually studied as if it were a matter of an isolatable system of operation. Production and consumption are linked together, but, considered jointly, it does not seem difficult to study them as one might study an elementary operation relatively independent of that which it is not.

This method is legitimate, and science never proceeds differently. However, economic science does not give results of the same order as physics studying, first, a precise phenomenon, then all studiable phenomena as a coordinated whole. Economic phenomena are not easy to isolate, and their general coordination is not easy to establish. So it is possible to raise this question concerning them: Shouldn't productive activity as a whole be considered in terms of the modifications it receives from its surroundings or brings about in its surroundings? In other words, isn't there a need to study the system of human production and consumption within a much larger framework?

In the sciences such problems ordinarily have an academic character, but economic activity is so far-reaching that no one will be surprised if a first question is followed by other, less abstract ones: In overall industrial development, are there not social conflicts and planetary wars? In the global activity of men, in short, are there not causes and effects that will appear only provided that *the general data of the economy* are studied? Will we be able to make ourselves the masters of such a dangerous activity (and one that we could not abandon in any case) without having grasped its *general* consequences? Should we not, given the constant development of economic forces, pose the *general* problems that are linked to the movement of energy on the globe?

These questions allow one to glimpse both the theoretical meaning and the practical importance of the principles they introduce.

The Necessity of Losing the Excess Energy that Cannot be Used for a System's Growth

At first sight, it is easy to recognize in the economy – *in the production and use of wealth* – a particular aspect of terrestrial activity regarded as a cosmic phenomenon. A movement is produced on the surface of the globe that results from the circulation of energy

at this point in the universe. The economic activity of men appropriates this movement, making use of the resulting possibilities for certain ends. But this movement has a pattern and laws with which, as a rule, those who use them and depend on them are unacquainted. Thus the question arises: Is the general determination of energy circulating in the biosphere altered by man's activity? Or rather, isn't the latter's intention vitiated by a determination of which it is ignorant, which it overlooks and cannot change?

Without waiting, I will give an inescapable answer.

Man's disregard for the material basis of his life still causes him to err in a serious way. Humanity exploits given material resources, but by restricting them as it does to a resolution of the immediate difficulties it encounters (a resolution which it has hastily had to define as an ideal), it assigns to the forces it employs an end which they cannot have. Beyond our immediate ends, man's activity in fact pursues the useless and infinite fulfillment of the universe.[1]

Of course, the error that results from so complete a disregard does not just concern man's claim to lucidity. It is not easy to realize one's own ends if one must, in trying to do so, carry out a movement that surpasses them. No doubt these ends and this movement may not be entirely irreconcilable; but if these two terms are to be reconciled we must cease to ignore one of them; otherwise, our works quickly turn to catastrophe.

I will begin with a basic fact: The living organism, in a situation determined by the play of energy on the surface of the globe, ordinarily receives more energy than is necessary for maintaining life; the excess energy (wealth) can be used for the growth of a system (e.g., an organism); if the system can no longer grow, or if the excess cannot be completely absorbed in its growth, it must necessarily be lost without profit; it must be spent, willingly or not, gloriously or catastrophically.

The Poverty of Organisms or Limited Systems and the Excess Wealth of Living Nature

Minds accustomed to seeing the development of productive forces as the ideal end of activity refuse to recognize that energy, which constitutes wealth, must ultimately be spent lavishly (without return), and that a series of profitable operations has absolutely no other effect than the squandering of profits. To affirm that it is necessary to dissipate a substantial portion of energy produced, sending it up in smoke, is to go against judgments that form the basis of a rational economy. We know cases where wealth has had to be destroyed (coffee thrown into the sea), but these scandals cannot reasonably be offered as examples to follow. They are the acknowledgment of an impotence, and no one could find in them the image and essence of wealth. Indeed, involuntary destruction (such as the disposal of coffee overboard) has in every case the meaning of failure; it is experienced as a misfortune; in no way can it be presented as desirable. And yet it is the type of operation without which there is no solution. When one considers the *totality* of productive wealth on the surface of the globe, it is evident that the products of this wealth can be employed for productive ends only insofar as the living organism that is economic mankind can increase its equipment. This is not entirely – neither always nor indefinitely – possible. A surplus must be dissipated through deficit operations: The final dissipation cannot fail to carry out the movement that animates terrestrial energy.

The contrary usually appears for the reason that the economy is never considered *in general*. The human mind reduces operations, in science as in life, to an entity based on typical *particular* systems (organisms or enterprises). Economic activity, considered as a whole, is conceived in terms of particular operations with limited ends. The mind generalizes by composing the aggregate

of these operations. Economic science merely generalizes the isolated situation; it restricts its object to operations carried out with a view to a limited end, that of economic man. It does not take into consideration a play of energy that no particular end limits: the play of *living matter in general*, involved in the movement of light of which it is the result. On the surface of the globe, for *living matter in general*, energy is always in excess; the question is always posed in terms of extravagance. The choice is limited to how the wealth is to be squandered. It is to the *particular* living being, or to limited populations of living beings, that the problem of necessity presents itself. But man is not just the separate being that contends with the living world and with other men for his share of resources. The general movement of exudation (of waste) of living matter impels him, and he cannot stop it; moreover, being at the summit, his sovereignty in the living world identifies him with this movement; it destines him, in a privileged way, to that glorious operation, to useless consumption. If he denies this, as he is constantly urged to do by the consciousness of a *necessity*, of an indigence inherent in separate beings (which are constantly short of resources, which are nothing but eternally *needy* individuals), his denial does not alter the global movement of energy in the least: The latter cannot accumulate limitlessly in the productive forces; eventually, like a river into the sea, it is bound to escape us and be lost to us.

War Considered as a Catastrophic Expenditure of Excess Energy

Incomprehension does not change the final outcome in the slightest. We can ignore or forget the fact that the ground we live on is little other than a field of multiple destructions. Our ignorance only has this incontestable effect: It causes us to *undergo* what we could *bring about* in our own way, if we understood. It deprives

us of the choice of an exudation that might suit us. Above all, it consigns men and their works to catastrophic destructions. For if we do not have the force to destroy the surplus energy ourselves, it cannot be used, and, like an unbroken animal that cannot be trained, it is this energy that destroys us; it is we who pay the price of the inevitable explosion.

These excesses of life force, which locally block the poorest economies, are in fact the most dangerous factors of ruination. Hence relieving the blockage was always, if only in the darkest region of consciousness, the object of a feverish pursuit. Ancient societies found relief in festivals; some erected admirable monuments that had no useful purpose; we use the excess to multiply "services" that make life smoother,[2] and we are led to reabsorb part of it by increasing leisure time. But these diversions have always been inadequate: Their existence *in excess* nevertheless (in certain respects) has perpetually doomed multitudes of human beings and great quantities of useful goods to the destruction of wars. In our time, the relative importance of armed conflicts has even increased; it has taken on the disastrous proportions of which we are aware.

Recent history is the result of the soaring growth of industrial activity. At first this prolific movement restrained martial activity by absorbing the main part of the excess: The development of modern industry yielded the period of relative peace from 1815 to 1914.[3] Developing in this way, increasing the resources, the productive forces made possible in the same period the rapid demographic expansion of the advanced countries (this is the fleshly aspect of the bony proliferation of the factories). But in the long run the growth that the technical changes made possible became difficult to sustain. It became productive of an increased surplus itself. The First World War broke out before its limits were really reached, even locally. The Second did not itself signify that the

system could not develop further (either extensively or in any case intensively). But it weighed the possibilities of a halt in development and ceased to enjoy the opportunities of a growth that nothing opposed. It is sometimes denied that the industrial plethora was at the origin of these recent wars, particularly the first. Yet it was this plethora that both wars exuded; its size was what gave them their extraordinary intensity. Consequently, the general principle of an excess of energy to be expended, considered (beyond the too narrow scope of the economy) as the effect of a movement that surpasses it, tragically illuminates a set of facts; moreover, it takes on a significance that no one can deny. We can express the hope of avoiding a war that already threatens. But in order to do so we must divert the surplus production, either into the rational extension of a difficult industrial growth, or into unproductive works that will dissipate an energy that cannot be accumulated in any case. This raises numerous problems, which are exhaustingly complex.[4] One can be skeptical of arriving easily at the practical solutions they demand, but the interest they hold is unquestionable.

I will simply state, without waiting further, that the extension of economic growth itself requires the overturning of economic principles – the overturning of the ethics that grounds them. Changing from the perspectives of *restrictive* economy to those of *general* economy actually accomplishes a Copernican transformation: a reversal of thinking – and of ethics. If a part of wealth (subject to a rough estimate) is doomed to destruction or at least to unproductive use without any possible profit, it is logical, even *inescapable*, to surrender commodities without return. Henceforth, leaving aside pure and simple dissipation, analogous to the construction of the Pyramids, the possibility of pursuing growth is itself subordinated to giving: The industrial development of the entire world demands of Americans that they lucidly grasp the

necessity, for an economy such as theirs, of having a margin of profitless operations. An immense industrial network cannot be managed in the same way that one changes a tire.... It expresses a circuit of cosmic energy on which it depends, which it cannot limit, and whose laws it cannot ignore without consequences. Woe to those who, to the very end, insist on regulating the movement that exceeds them with the narrow mind of the mechanic who changes a tire.

Laws of General Economy

The Superabundance of Biochemical Energy and Growth

That as a rule an organism has at its disposal greater energy resources than are necessary for the operations that sustain life (functional activities and, in animals, essential muscular exercises, the search for food) is evident from functions like growth and reproduction. Neither growth nor reproduction would be possible if plants and animals did not normally dispose of an excess. The very principle of living matter requires that the chemical operations of life, which demand an expenditure of energy, be gainful, productive of surpluses.

Let us consider a domestic animal, a calf. (In order not to go too deeply into the matter, I will first leave aside the different contributions of animal or human energy that enable its food to be produced; every organism depends on the contribution of others, and if this contribution is favorable, it extracts the necessary energy from it, but without it the organism would soon die.) Functional activity utilizes part of the available energy, but the animal commands an excess that ensures its growth. Under normal conditions, a part of this excess is lost in comings and goings, but if the stock grower manages to keep it inactive, the

volume of the calf benefits; the saving appears in the form of fat. If the calf is not killed the moment comes when the reduced growth no longer consumes all of an increased excess; the calf then reaches sexual maturity; its vital forces are devoted mainly to the turbulence of the bull in the case of a male, or to pregnancy and the production of milk in the case of a female. In a sense, reproduction signifies a passage from individual growth to that of a group. If the male is castrated, its individual volume again increases for a time and a considerable amount of work is extracted from it.

In nature there is no artificial fattening of the newborn, nor is there castration. It was convenient for me to choose a domestic animal as an example, but the movements of animal matter are basically the same in all cases. On the whole, the excess energy provides for the growth or the turbulence of individuals. The calf and the cow, the bull and the ox merely add a richer and more familiar illustration of this great movement.

Plants manifest the same excess, but it is much more pronounced in their case. They are nothing but growth and reproduction (the energy necessary for their functional activity is neglible). But this indefinite exuberance must be considered in relation to the conditions that make it possible – and that limit it.

The Limits of Growth

I will speak briefly about the most general conditions of life, dwelling on one crucially important fact: Solar energy is the source of life's exuberant development. The origin and essence of our wealth are given in the radiation of the sun, which dispenses energy – wealth – without any return. The sun gives without ever receiving. Men were conscious of this long before astrophysics measured that ceaseless prodigality; they saw it ripen the harvests and they associated its splendor with the act of someone who gives

without receiving. It is necessary at this point to note a dual origin of moral judgments. In former times value was given to unproductive glory, whereas in our day it is measured in terms of production: Precedence is given to energy acquisition over energy expenditure. Glory itself is justified by the consequences of a glorious deed in the sphere of utility. But, dominated though it is by practical judgment and Christian morality, the archaic sensibility is still alive: In particular it reappears in the romantic protest against the bourgeois world; only in the classical conceptions of the economy does it lose its rights entirely.

Solar radiation results in a superabundance of energy on the surface of the globe. But, first, living matter receives this energy and accumulates it within the limits given by the space that is available to it. It then radiates or squanders it, but before devoting an appreciable share to this radiation it makes maximum use of it for growth. Only the impossibility of continuing growth makes way for squander. Hence the real excess does not begin until the growth of the individual or group has reached its limits.

The immediate limitation, for each individual or each group, is given by the other individuals or other groups. But the terrestrial sphere (to be exact, the *biosphere*[5]), which corresponds to the space available to life, is the only real limit. The *individual* or group can be reduced by another individual or another group, but the total volume of living nature is not changed; in short, it is the size of the terrestrial space that limits overall growth.

Pressure

As a rule the surface of the globe is invested by life to the extent possible. By and large the myriad forms of life adapt it to the available resources, so that space is its basic limit. Certain disadvantaged areas, where the chemical operations essential to life cannot take place, seem to have no real existence. But taking into account

a constant relation of the biomass to the local climatic and geological conditions, life occupies all the available space. These local conditions determine the intensity of the *pressure* exerted in all directions by life. But one can speak of pressure in this sense only if, by some means, the available space is increased; this space will be immediately occupied in the same way as the adjoining space. Moreover, the same is true every time life is destroyed at some point on the globe, by a forest fire, by a volcanic phenomenon or by the hand of man. The most familiar example is that of a path that a gardener clears and maintains. Once abandoned, the pressure of the surrounding life soon covers it over again with weeds and bushes swarming with animal life.

If the path is paved with asphalt, it is for a long time sheltered from the pressure. This means that the volume of life possible, assuming that the path were abandoned instead of being covered with asphalt, will not be realized, that the additional energy corresponding to this volume is lost, is dissipated in some way. This pressure cannot be compared to that of a closed boiler. If the space is completely occupied, if there is no outlet anywhere, nothing bursts; but the pressure is there. In a sense, life suffocates within limits that are too close; it aspires in manifold ways to an impossible growth; it releases a steady flow of excess resources, possibly involving large squanderings of energy. The limit of growth being reached, life, without being in a closed container, at least enters into ebullition: Without exploding, its extreme exuberance pours out in a movement always bordering on explosion.

The consequences of this situation do not easily enter into our calculations. We calculate our interests, but this situation baffles us: The very word *interest* is contradictory with the *desire* at stake under these conditions. As soon as we want to act reasonably we have to consider the *utility* of our actions; utility implies an advantage, a maintenance or growth. Now, if it is necessary to respond

to exuberance, it is no doubt possible to *use* it for growth. But the problem raised precludes this. Supposing there is no longer any growth possible, what is to be done with the seething energy that remains? To waste it is obviously not to use it. And yet, what we have is a draining-away, a pure and simple loss, *which occurs in any case*: From the first, the excess energy, if it cannot be used for growth, is lost. Moreover, in no way can this inevitable loss be accounted useful. It is only a matter of an acceptable loss, preferable to another that is regarded as unacceptable: a question of *acceptability*, not utility. Its consequences are decisive, however.

The First Effect of Pressure: Extension

It is hard to define and precisely represent the pressure thus exerted. It is both complex and elusive, but one can describe its effects. An image comes to mind, then, but I must say in offering it that it illustrates the consequences yet does not give a concrete idea of the cause.

Imagine an immense crowd assembled in the expectation of witnessing a bullfight that will take place in a bullring that is too small. The crowd wants badly to enter but cannot be entirely accommodated: Many people must wait outside. Similarly, the possibilities of life cannot be realized indefinitely; they are limited by the space, just as the entry of the crowd is limited by the number of seats in the bullring.

A first effect of the pressure will be to increase the number of seats in the bullring.

If the security service is well-organized, this number is limited precisely. But outside there may be trees and lampposts from the top of which the arena is visible. If there is no regulation against it, there will be people who will climb these trees and lampposts. Similarly, the earth first opens to life the primary space of the waters and the surface of the ground. But life quickly takes

possession of the air. To start with, it was important to enlarge the surface of the green substance of plants, which absorbs the radiant energy of light. The superposition of leaves in the air extends the volume of this substance considerably: In particular, the structure of trees develops this possibility well beyond the level of the grasses. For their part the winged insects and the birds, in the wake of the pollens, invade the air.

The Second Effect of Pressure: Squander or Luxury

But the lack of room can have another effect: A fight may break out at the entrance. If lives are lost the excess of individuals over the number of seats will decrease. This effect works in a sense contrary to the first one. Sometimes the pressure results in the clearing of a new space, other times in the erasing of possibilities in excess of the available room. This last effect operates in nature in the most varied forms.

The most remarkable is death. As we know, death is not necessary. The simple forms of life are immortal: The birth of an organism reproduced through scissiparity is lost in the mists of time. Indeed, it cannot be said to have had parents. Take for example the doubles A' and A'', resulting from the splitting in two of A; A has not ceased living with the coming into being of A'; A' is still A (and the same is true of A''). But let us suppose (this is purely theoretical, for the purpose of demonstration) that in the beginning of life there was just one of these infinitesimal creatures: It would nonetheless have quickly populated the earth with its species. After a short time, in theory, reproduction would have become impossible for lack of room, and the energy it utilizes would have dissipated, e.g., in the form of heat. Moreover, this is what happens to one of these micro-organisms, duckweed, which covers a pond with a green film, after which it remains in equilibrium. For the duckweed, space is given within the narrowly

determined limits of a pond. But the stagnation of the duckweed is not conceivable on the scale of the entire globe, where in any case the necessary equilibrium is lacking. It can be granted (theoretically) that a pressure everywhere equal to itself would result in a state of rest, in a general substitution of heat loss for reproduction. But real pressure has different results: It puts unequal organisms in competition with one another, and although we cannot say how the species take part in the dance, we can say what the dance is.

Besides the external action of life (climatic or volcanic phenomena), the unevenness of pressure in living matter continually makes available to growth the place left vacant by death. It is not a new space, and if one considers life as a whole, there is not really growth but a maintenance of volume in general. In other words, the possible growth is reduced to a compensation for the destructions that are brought about.

I insist on the fact that there is generally no growth but only a luxurious squandering of energy in every form! The history of life on earth is mainly the effect of a wild exuberance; the dominant event is the development of luxury, the production of increasingly burdensome forms of life.

The Three Luxuries of Nature: Eating, Death and Sexual Reproduction

The eating of one species by another is the simplest form of luxury. The populations that were trapped by the German army acquired, thanks to the food shortage, a vulgarized knowledge of this burdensome character of the indirect development of living matter. If one cultivates potatoes or wheat, the land's yield in consumable calories is much greater than that of livestock in milk and meat for an equivalent acreage of pasture. The least burdensome form of life is that of a green micro-organism (absorbing the

sun's energy through the action of chlorophyll), but generally vegetation is less burdensome than animal life. Vegetation quickly occupies the available space. Animals make it a field of slaughter and extend its possibilities in this way; they themselves develop more slowly. In this respect, the wild beast is at the summit: Its continual depredations of depredators represent an immense squandering of energy. William Blake asked the tiger: "In what distant deeps or skies burned the fire of thine eyes?" What struck him in this way was the cruel pressure, at the limits of possibility, the tiger's immense power of consumption of life. In the general effervescence of life, the tiger is a point of extreme incandescence. And this incandescence did in fact burn first in the remote depths of the sky, in the sun's consumption.

Eating brings death, but in an accidental form. *Of all conceivable luxuries, death, in its fatal and inexorable form, is undoubtedly the most costly*. The fragility, the complexity, of the animal body already exhibits its luxurious quality, but this fragility and luxury culminate in death. Just as in space the trunks and branches of the tree raise the superimposed stages of the foliage to the light, death distributes the passage of the generations over time. It constantly leaves the necessary room for the coming of the newborn, and we are wrong to curse *the one without whom we would not exist*.

In reality, when we curse death we only fear ourselves: The severity of *our will* is what makes us tremble. We lie to ourselves when we dream of escaping the movement of luxurious exuberance of which we are only the most intense form. Or perhaps we only lie to ourselves in the beginning the better to experience the severity of this will afterward, carrying it to the rigorous extreme of consciousness.

In this respect, the luxury of death is regarded by us in the same way as that of sexuality, first as a negation of ourselves,

then – in a sudden reversal – as the profound truth of that movement of which life is the manifestation.

Under the present conditions, independently of our consciousness, sexual reproduction is, together with eating and death, one of the great luxurious detours that ensure the intense consumption of energy. To begin with, it accentuates that which scissiparity announced: the division by which the individual being foregoes growth for himself and, through the multiplication of individuals, transfers it to the impersonality of life. This is because, from the first, sexuality differs from miserly growth: If, with regard to the species, sexuality appears as a growth, in principle it is nevertheless the luxury of individuals. This characteristic is more accentuated in sexual reproduction, where the individuals engendered are clearly separate from those that engender them and *give* them life as one *gives to others*. But without renouncing a subsequent return to the principle of growth for the period of nutrition, the reproduction of the higher animals has not ceased to deepen the fault that separates it from the simple tendency to eat in order to increase volume and power. For these animals sexual reproduction is the occasion of a sudden and frantic squandering of energy resources, carried in a moment to the limit of possibility (in time what the tiger is in space). This squandering goes far beyond what would be sufficient for the growth of the species. It appears to be the most that an individual has the strength to accomplish in a given moment. It leads to the wholesale destruction of property – in spirit, the destruction of bodies as well – and ultimately connects up with the senseless luxury and excess of death.

Extension Through Labor and Technology, and the Luxury of Man

Man's activity is basically conditioned by this general movement

of life. In a sense, *in extension*, his activity opens up a new possibility to life, a new space (as did tree branches and bird wings in nature). The space that labor and technical know-how open to the increased reproduction of men is not, in the proper sense, one that life has not yet populated. But human activity transforming the world augments the mass of living matter with supplementary apparatuses, composed of an immense quantity of inert matter, which considerably increases the resources of available energy. From the first, man has the option of utilizing part of the available energy for the growth (not biological but technical) of his energy wealth. The techniques have in short made it possible to extend – to develop – the elementary movement of growth that life realizes within the limits of the possible. Of course, this development is neither continuous nor boundless. Sometimes the cessation of development corresponds to a stagnation of techniques; other times, the invention of new techniques leads to a resurgence. The growth of energy resources can itself serve as the basis of a resumption of biological (demographic) growth. The history of Europe in the nineteenth century is the best (and best known) illustration of these vast living proliferations of which technical equipment is the ossature: We are aware of the extent of the population growth linked at first to the rise of industry.

In actual fact the quantitative relations of population and toolmaking – and, in general, the conditions of economic development in history – are subject to so many interferences that it is always difficult to determine their exact distribution. In any case, I cannot incorporate detailed analyses into an overall survey that seems the only way of outlining the vast movement which animates the earth. But the recent decline in demographic growth by itself reveals the complexity of the effects. The fact is that the revivals of development that are due to human activity, that are made possible or maintained by new techniques, always have a

double effect: Initially, they use a portion of the surplus energy, but then they produce a larger and larger surplus. This surplus eventually contributes to making growth more difficult, for growth no longer suffices to use it up. At a certain point the advantage of extension is neutralized by the contrary advantage, that of luxury; the former remains operative, but in a disappointing – uncertain, often powerless – way. The drop in the demographic curves is perhaps the first indicator of the change of sign that has occurred: Henceforth what matters *primarily* is no longer to develop the productive forces but to spend their products sumptuously.

At this point, immense squanderings are about to take place: After a century of populating and of industrial peace, the temporary limit of development being encountered, the two world wars organized the greatest orgies of wealth – and of human beings – that history has recorded. Yet these orgies coincide with an appreciable rise in the general standard of living: The majority of the population benefits from more and more unproductive services; work is reduced and wages are increased overall.

Thus, man is only a roundabout, subsidiary response to the problem of growth. Doubtless, through labor and technique, he has made possible an extension of growth beyond the given limits. But just as the herbivore relative to the plant, and the carnivore relative to the herbivore, is a luxury, man is the most suited of all living beings to consume intensely, sumptuously, the excess energy offered up by the pressure of life to conflagrations befitting the solar origins of its movement.

The Accursed Share

This truth is paradoxical, to the extent of being exactly contrary to the usual perception.

This paradoxical character is underscored by the fact that, even at the highest point of exuberance, its significance is still veiled.

Under present conditions, everything conspires to obscure the basic movement that tends to restore wealth to its function, to gift-giving, to squandering without reciprocation. On the one hand, mechanized warfare, producing its ravages, characterizes this movement as something alien, hostile to human will. On the other hand, the raising of the standard of living is in no way represented as a requirement of luxury. The movement that demands it is even a protest against the luxury of the great fortunes: thus the demand made in the name of *justice*. Without having anything against justice, obviously, one may be allowed to point out that here the word conceals the profound truth of its contrary, which is precisely *freedom*. Under the mask of justice, it is true that general *freedom* takes on the lackluster and neutral appearance of existence subjected to the necessities: If anything, it is a narrowing of limits *to what is most just*; it is not a dangerous breaking-loose, a meaning that the word has lost. It is a guarantee against the risk of servitude, not a will to assume those risks without which there is no freedom.

Opposition of the "General" Viewpoint to the "Particular" Viewpoint

Of course, the fact of being afraid, of turning away from a movement of dilapidation, which impels us and even *defines* us, is not surprising. The consequences of this movement are distressing from the start. The image of the tiger reveals the truth of eating. Death has become our horror, and though in a sense the fact of being carnivorous and of facing death bravely answers to the demand of virility (but that is a different matter!); sexuality is linked to the scandals of death and the eating of meat.[6]

But this atmosphere of malediction presupposes anguish, and anguish for its part signifies the absence (or weakness) of the pressure exerted by the exuberance of life. Anguish arises when the

anxious individual is not himself stretched tight by the feeling of superabundance. This is precisely what evinces the isolated, individual character of anguish. There can be anguish only from a personal, *particular* point of view that is radically opposed to the *general* point of view based on the exuberance of living matter as a whole. Anguish is meaningless for someone who overflows with life, and for life as a whole, which is an overflowing by its very nature.

As for the present historical situation, it is characterized by the fact that judgments concerning the *general* situation proceed from a *particular* point of view. As a rule, *particular* existence always risks succumbing for lack of resources. It contrasts with *general* existence whose resources are in excess and for which death has no meaning. From the *particular* point of view, the problems are posed *in the first instance* by a deficiency of resources. They are posed *in the first instance* by an excess of resources if one starts from the *general* point of view. Doubtless the problem of extreme poverty remains in any case. Moreover, it should be understood that *general economy* must also, whenever possible and first of all, envisage the development of growth. But if it considers poverty or growth, it takes into account the limits that the one and the other cannot fail to encounter and the dominant (decisive) character of the problems that follow from the existence of surpluses.

Briefly considering an example, the problem of extreme poverty in India cannot immediately be dissociated from the demographic growth of that country, or from the lack of proportion with its industrial development. India's possibilities of industrial growth cannot themselves be dissociated from the excesses of American resources. A typical problem of *general economy* emerges from this situation. On the one hand, there appears the need for an exudation; on the other hand, the need for a growth. The present state of the world is defined by the unevenness of the (quantitative or qualitative) pressure exerted by human life. General

economy suggests, therefore, as a correct operation, a transfer of American wealth to India without reciprocation. This proposal takes into account the threat to America that would result from the pressure – and the imbalances of pressure – exerted in the world by the developments of Hindu life.

These considerations necessarily give first priority to the problem of war, which can be clearly regarded only in the light of a fundamental ebullition. The only solution is in raising the global standard of living under the current moral conditions, the only means of absorbing the American surplus, thereby reducing the pressure to below the danger point.

This theoretical conception differs little from the empirical views that have recently appeared concerning the subject, but it is more radical, and it is interesting to note that these views have agreed with the above ideas, which were conceived earlier: This confirmation gives added strength, it seems, to both contradictions.

The Solutions of General Economy and "Self-Consciousness"

But it has to be added at once that, however well-defined the solutions, their implementation on the required scale is so difficult that from the outset the undertaking hardly looks encouraging. The theoretical solution exists; indeed, its necessity is far from escaping the notice of those on whom the decision seems to depend. Nevertheless, and even more clearly, what *general economy* defines first is the explosive character of this world, carried to the extreme degree of explosive tension in the present time. A curse obviously weighs on human life insofar as it does not have the strength to control a vertiginous movement. It must be stated as a principle, without hesitation, that the lifting of such a curse depends on man and *only on man*. But it cannot be lifted if the movement from which it emanates does not appear clearly *in con-*

sciousness. In this regard it seems rather disappointing to have nothing more to propose, as a remedy for the catastrophe that threatens, than the "raising of the living standard." This recourse, as I have said, is linked to a *refusal to see*, in its *truth*, the exigency to which the recourse is intended to respond.

Yet if one considers at the same time the weakness and the virtue of this solution, two things become immediately apparent: that it is the only one capable of rather wide acceptance; and that, due to its equivocal nature, it provokes and stimulates an effort of lucidity all the greater for seeming to be far removed from such an effort. In this way the avoidance of the truth ensures, in reciprocal fashion, a recognition of the truth. In any case, the mind of contemporary man would be reluctant to embrace solutions that, not being negative, were emphatic and arbitrary; it prefers that exemplary rigor of consciousness which alone may slowly make human life commensurate with its truth. The exposition of a *general economy* implies intervention in public affairs, certainly; but first of all and more profoundly, what it aims at is consciousness, what it looks to from the outset is the *self-consciousness* that man would finally achieve in the lucid vision of its linked historical forms.

Thus, *general economy* begins with an account of the historical data, relating their meaning to the *present data*.