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## **How I Came to Embrace the Principles Embraced by Henry George**

**By Kosta Antoniadis**

Kostas Antoniadis continues our series of personal journeys relating the different paths by which we arrive at geoism. To “see the cat” is to experience a sort of revelation, in the manner of when a kid sees the hidden cat in those activity book drawings of a tree or bush. After you’ve seen the cat, the geoist paradigm just seems so obvious.

I was born in a tin shed in Thessaloniki, Greece in 1966. Even compared to tin sheds, it wasn’t exactly the Hilton. There was no running water, no toilet and no lock on the door. And we were not unique. Poverty and injustice reigned supreme. While the king dined on gold-lined crockery, my parents dipped stale bread in water for their daily meal.

There existed two Greece’s then – the glamorous tourist Mecca personified by Onassis and, the real one. They existed side by side, one oblivious to the other – rather like modern theories of parallel universes. By 1967, the people had had enough and the military seized control. But while their motives may have been noble, life under a junta was not much better.

Accompanying advertisements of a ‘land of opportunity’ was a steady stream of ex-pats returning with stories of opportunity and prosperity. My parents figured they could work in Australia for 2 years and return wealthy. The rest, as they say, is history. With little more than the proverbial clothes on our backs, we migrated to Australia in 1971. I was exposed to the term ‘survival’ much younger than any child should ever be. Since both parents were at work, I had to ready myself, feed and dress my 3 year old sister, take her to kinder by the hand, then be at the bus stop to wait for the school bus before the big hand reached the 9 – I was aged 5. I could not speak a single word of English when I started school but within a year, I had to read and translate mail as my parents could not read English (I was the expert since I was now in Grade 1).

Although much improved, times were still tough. I remember many dinners where my parents would watch my sister and I eat. ‘We’re not hungry’ they would say, ‘you eat up!’ It was not until many years later I would learn there just simply wasn’t enough to go round. Mum and dad always seemed to be working. At one stage, my father had seven (yes that’s seven) jobs simultaneously. He would leave before I woke and return home many hours after I had gone to bed. Thankfully, this did not last long.

But there was never any bitterness or resentment at the hand life had dealt us - only acceptance that it was up to us to determine our destiny. Despite the hardships (or maybe because of them) our home was fertile ground for optimism and opportunity. And we did well. Within a few short years, we bought a modest home in West Footscray, dad concreted the entire front yard (so as to avoid mowing the lawn), and we always had enough to eat. We even did some renovations, like replacing the original double hung timber windows with more modern aluminium ones and covering up those useless old fire places with imitation timber wall panelling. We even had a car. We had come a long way!

Growing up, words like justice, fairness, truth, were a big part of my life. Whether it was the value system I inherited from my parents or the experiences I learnt from life I cannot say (perhaps a bit of both) but the beginnings of a social consciousness stirred early in me. Shakespeare's quote 'sweet are the uses of adversity' proved most apt for I gained an appreciation of life that would become permanently imprinted on my psyche.

It's truly amazing what you notice when you're down looking up! I couldn't understand for instance, how we (Australians) could spend thousands of dollars on Valentine's Day, Moomba, Mothers' and Fathers' Days etc. when tens of thousands of children literally starved to death each day. Yes, that's starved....you know.....dying of hunger. Try going a day (just one) without food - life immediately takes on a different perspective. I found the commercialisation of religious holidays like Christmas and Easter, particularly ironic. I don't remember what year it was, but at some point in the 90s, the G7 countries spent over \$2Billion on a conference to deal with....you guessed it....world poverty.

*Until he extends his circle of  
compassion to include all living  
things, man will not himself find  
peace.  
- Albert Schweitzer*

Throughout my school years, I remember an almost constant pressure to do well at school. "Gramata" my father would say "Mathe gramata", it roughly translates to 'get an education'. He believed, not having an education himself, that education was the key to a better life for his children. In subtle ways, he tried his best to get me to come round to his way of thinking. A carpenter by trade, he would take me to work with him on school holidays and make me sand furniture all day. A more monotonous, pull-you-hair-out boring activity you could not imagine. Hours and hours, days and days of sanding. 'Get used to it' he'd say, 'if you don't go to school, this is what you'll be doing for the rest of your life'.

My interests lay in astronomy, archaeology and philosophy. But in Melbourne's western suburbs, in the 70s - where knife throwing, gang fights, burglary, competitions to see how quickly one could pass out from alcohol and other equally savoury pastimes were regular recess activities - these pursuits were not exactly.....well.....common. Moreover, from what life had taught me, these were not interests that would put food on the table. Did I mention I hated sanding?

The result was that I entered adulthood with the conflicting positions of a strong social conscience and a goal of becoming financially secure. I became disillusioned and only after years of wasting my time indulging the senses, I decided, almost like the prodigal son, to change direction and do something with my life. I enrolled to do a finance degree at university.

**Very quickly, I developed an interest in economics.** It was much more interesting and challenging than I imagined. But I somehow couldn't get all the pieces to fit - something was always missing. And it was just sooooo complicated - there seemed so many aspects to consider. **Just when I thought I understood something, I would find an exception to prove myself wrong. I could not convince myself the theories were plausible. It was very frustrating and**

**I eventually concluded that it was my own limitations that prevented me from having a complete understanding of how economics worked. Economists must be so clever I thought.**

As time went on however, I realized that no-one had a complete understanding of economics. Every tutor, lecturer or expert I heard or read (even taxi drivers), was sooner or later proven a fraud. Their understanding of economics was no more than an educated (or more correctly indoctrinated) opinion – which was sooner or later proven flawed. I concluded it was more of an art than a science and, since I was no good at art, gave up and focused on accounting.

As I progressed through my accounting career, I came to realize that accounting was also an art, it just had many more ‘rules’ - and none applied to fashion. In any case, I for some reason, ‘got it’, accounting that is. It wasn’t terribly exciting but I was very good at it and it paid reasonably well, so I stuck with it.

One day, reading through the local paper, I stumbled across an ad entitled “An Introduction to Philosophy”. Wow, now here was a subject I could get passionate about. I had always had an interest in philosophy but I guess I just wasn’t ready until now. I enrolled and it changed my life forever. The word ‘Philosophy’ comes from the Greek words ‘philos’ (friend or love) and ‘sophia’ (wisdom) – a love of wisdom. It’s about the search for Truth. It comes in many different shapes and sizes but we all recognize Truth when we see it. The problem is that most of us, most of the time, are asleep – and therefore do not see it.

Amongst other things, my reinvigorated interest in philosophy also cultivated a renewed love of reading. I consumed book after book like they were popcorn at an Alfred Hitchcock thriller. One of these books was entitled “*The Prosperity Paradox*” by Dr Mark Hasted – not a complete stranger to Prosper Australia. For those who have not read it, it is basically a collection of speeches given by Henry George. Despite nearly 20 years in a ‘financial’ discipline, this was my first exposure to Henry George. I was floored.

**As I read through his speeches, I saw it. I saw the cat. I saw Truth. I saw what decades of education and sophisticated, modern economic theories could not show me. I knew it was Truth – I had lived it. I was at once intrigued and enchanted. Why did they not teach this at school? Could this be true? Surely not. Why had I not heard of this man? If the world knew of this, there would surely be a revolution. It can’t be true!**

*This we know. The earth does not belong to man; man belongs to the earth. This we know. All things are connected like the blood which unites one family. All things are connected.*  
- Chief Seattle

But it was true. This was the missing piece of the puzzle. The piece that made everything else to fall into place to reveal the big, beautiful picture the Creator had intended all of us to see - land.

I had to know more. I looked him up on the net and everything seemed to point to his

masterpiece '[Progress and Poverty](#)'. Looking back, I think there was an element of wanting to prove to myself, his arguments were flawed. That what I had learnt over the last 20 years was not an illusion and that the world was indeed sane. I could not.

I began to read and just could not put it down. I was like a man possessed. Try as I did to disprove his arguments, I simply could not. I found myself constantly nodding as if to say "well of course that's right", or 'it's so bleeding obvious'. Everything he said made sense. It was like I always knew it - it just had to be spelt out for me in order to accept it. One didn't have to understand economics (in the mainstream sense), one didn't have to possess extraordinary intellect, in fact, one didn't even have to show common sense. All one had to do was to 'see'. The Truth had always been there. One needs only to remove the shackles of preconception, habit and ego to see it.

His conclusions were well thought out, lucid and indisputable. Well.....I suppose you could dispute them – but you would be wrong. There is no grey. The simplicity of his arguments, the genius of his logic and the poetry of his delivery were (and remain) simply undeniable. Here was a man speaking immutable Truth. It resonated right through me. This was much more than economics. This was about a whole different way of looking at life. The way we were meant to look at life but that few had dared dream – and he proved it was possible.

As for the man himself: a Christian, a leader, a statesman and a champion of humanity. A truly inspirational man. Although economics was his weapon of choice, his motives were based in justice, righteousness and compassion for his fellow human beings. **He used economics to illustrate the application of the 2nd Commandment – love thy neighbour - and reveal at least in part, a grander plan.** Look at the leaders of our modern world. Of how many could this be said? Is it any wonder then that both the earth and its inhabitants are in such dire straits? And is it any wonder Georgists face such an uphill battle?

But it is not our leaders who are to blame. It is us. The vile, self perpetuating cancer we call government, only survives because we allow it to. It thrives on fears borne of ignorance and selfishness and can only survive while we are asleep. Someone once said that we have the government we deserve. What then does this say about us? Plato was not far wrong when he described democracy as only one step away from tyranny.

**In my lifetime, I have seen a 'dumbing down' of our population (I guess it is the nature of all things to run down).** We are constantly presented with a polar view of the world: good or bad, right or wrong, black or white, Christian or Muslim, rich or poor, Labour or Liberal. We then gravitate towards one side or the other and spend all our efforts unconsciously supporting it all the while closing our minds to other possibilities. But this is not the way the world is. This is only a mirage - not reality. This is us becoming what we're observing rather than what we are. The world is how we choose to make it – and Henry George saw what it could be – what it was meant to be.

As for the future, Carl Jung expressed it best when he said: What the nation does is done also by each individual, and so long as the individual continues to do it, the nation will do likewise. Only a change in the attitude of the individual can initiate a change in the psychology of the nation. The great problems of humanity were never yet solved by general laws but only through the regeneration of the attitudes of individuals.

By the time I had finished *Progress and Poverty*, 'the cat' was well and truly tattooed to my forehead. I read it in a book, but it had taken me a lifetime to see it. Now it was everywhere. I felt like Neo in 'The Matrix'. And like Neo, the search continues because once you've seen it, you can never go back.