DEBATE WITH SCHWEICKART AND ALBERT

NONSENSE ON STILTS?

David Schweickart and Michael Albert
Nonsense on Stilts
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For the reply to this review please see: Albert: Criticism Without Comprehension

What are we to make of the "Parecon" phenomenon? Michael Albert's book made it to number thirteen on Amazon.com a few days after some on-line promotion.[1] Eight of the twelve Amazon.com reviewers (when I last checked) had given the book five stars. It has been, or is being, translated into Arabic, Bengali, Telagu, Croatian, Czech, Finnish, French, German, Greek, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Spanish, Swedish and Turkish.[2] The book has been endorsed by Noam Chomsky, who says it "merits close attention, debate and action," by Arundhati Roy, who calls it "a brave argument for a much needed alternative economic vision," by Ben Bagdikian, who finds it "a compelling book for our times," and by Howard Zinn, who sees it as "a thoughtful, profound meditation on what a good society can be like."[3] Yet it is a terrible book.

To be sure, there are lots of terrible books on politics and economics being written for popular audiences these days, but these are usually right-wing harangues beating up on liberals. They are not endorsed by the likes of the above, who are all very left and very smart. Albert himself is a smart guy. He has incredible energy. Z-Net, Z Magazine and South End Press, all of which he was instrumental in bringing into being, have been important to radical activists and intellectuals over the years, now more than ever. Many of his debates and discussions are insightful. I don't always agree with him, but his arguments are often subtle, not easy to counter, well worth pondering. Parecon is a different matter altogether.

I've been reluctant to criticize this book so harshly in public, since it is written by someone who is part of the same global justice movement that commands my allegiance. I suspect I am not alone in my reticence. The Left has a bad history of destructive in-fighting. But Parecon has developed a certain following among younger activists. It now feels to me irresponsible to ignore the book. The intellectual (and moral) integrity of the movement requires that we debate key issues openly. If something is really bad, we should say so.

Before reflecting further on the Parecon phenomenon, let me substantiate my claim that Parecon is a terrible book. It isn't "morally pernicious," (as are, say, the works of neo-con intellectuals and the print ravings of the Fox News and right-wing talk-radio crowd), but it can't be taken seriously on its own terms, intellectually. The book is an elaboration and defense of an economic model that is hopelessly, irredeemably flawed.

The Parecon Model: A Critique

Albert's book proposes and defends a non-market alternative to capitalism that is radically different from the traditional Soviet model. Parecon (a "participatory economy") has three fundamental features.

· All workplaces are non-hierarchical. Everyone, both within a given workplace and in society at large, has a "balanced job complex" that gives everyone a roughly equal mix of interesting, empowering tasks and unpleasant "disempowering" ones.

· Everyone receives roughly the same income. Income will depend solely on hours worked and effort.
There is no market competition in Parecon, no "invisible hand" determining the allocation of goods, services and resources. Instead consumers indicate each year what they would like to consume and in what quantities. Workers indicate what they are willing to produce. If these two patterns don't match, negotiation take place at various levels, involving consumer councils, worker councils and facilitation boards until a coherent plan is compiled. If there are several such plans, voters choose the one they prefer.

**Balanced Job Complexes**

Let us begin with the first feature, and ask some questions about details. How exactly are these balanced complexes to be arrived at within a given enterprise? Well, we'll make a list of the tasks to be done, ranking them, say, from 1-20, "the higher being the more empowering, the lower being the more deadening" (105). We will then create individual jobs for each worker by bundling the tasks so that everyone's weighted average is the same. (If a quarter of your work time is spent doing a 20-level task and three quarters a 4, your weighted average is 8.)

Who is going to do all this ranking and bundling? The employees themselves, since there is to be no hierarchy here. We will meet and negotiate. We'll reach an agreement as to what the tasks are, how they should be ranked, how they should be combined and, finally, who will do what. In the end, everyone will be happy. Solidarity will be enhanced. Right?

It is possible to imagine such a process at South End Press, which has five employees.[4] But let's think about it at my place of work, a medium-sized university with about a thousand faculty members and an equal number of staff. Faculty Council (an elected body currently existing at Loyola) together with Staff Council (also an existing body) will be charged with drawing up a list of all the tasks the two thousand of us perform over the course of a year, then ranking them in order of "empowerment". This will be, as Albert admits, "a long list . . . hundreds, perhaps even thousands of stripped down tasks" (105). We'll assign empowerment numbers to our thousand or so tasks. We'll then estimate how many hours per year each task will need to be performed. From these tasks, we'll construct two thousand bundles, each bundle representing the tasks one of us is be expected to perform over the course of a year. We will construct them so that each bundle is equally empowering. Then we'll assign everybody one of these "balanced job complexes."

Okay, suppose I'm on Faculty Council. Where to begin? First of all, we'll have to have a joint meeting of the Faculty and Staff Councils to decide what tasks our colleagues perform, and how empowering they are. The tasks will include tasks typically done by faculty members-- attending various departmental and university meetings, preparing for courses, classroom time, doing research, writing papers, advising and counseling students, etc.--as well as staff tasks--secretarial, housekeeping, security, mail room, buildings and grounds, food services, etc. We'll have to construct this list, which will be rather long, then assign numbers from 1-20 to each task, depending on the degree of empowerment each task involves.

Then we'll have to determine how many hours our two thousand colleagues currently spend, collectively, on each task. The only way to do this, it seems to me, is to send out a survey to everyone, and ask each person to indicate how many hours of each task they typically perform in year. (We should remind them that the total time should come out to forty hours a week, more or less, just to be sure that they fill out this survey conscientiously. We'd better give them a deadline--and think about some penalties to impose for people who don't comply.)

When the survey results have come in and have been vetted for reasonable accuracy (presumably by a subcommittee that will send back the sloppy ones to be redone), the Faculty-Staff Council will reconvene. We'll now bundle the tasks together into equally-empowering jobs. What should the empowerment average be? That's easy enough to determine. If we had, say, three tasks, X, Y
and Z that needed to be performed for x, y and z hours, respectively over the course of a year, and if they were weighted 1, 2 and 3 respectively, then each job complex should have a rating of \((x + 2y + 3z)/2000\). (Of course we have a lot more than three tasks--maybe a thousand--but the principle is the same.)

Now we must construct two thousand bundles. We have some options now--quite a few, in fact. Suppose there are only three tasks, as in our hypothetical example. We could ask everyone to perform \(x/2000\) hours of X, \(y/2000\) hours of Y and \(z/2000\) hours of Z each year. Or we could construct bundles that have different proportions of the three tasks. Some tasks might involve more hours of X, in which case they would also have more hours of Z (to counterbalance the low empowerment of X with the high empowerment of Z), and, consequently, little or no Y. In playing around with numbers, we realize that there are, in fact, an infinite number of ways of constructing bundles having average empowerment. And if we have more than three tasks, we have even more options. An embarrassment of riches!

From the infinite number of possibilities, we'll select two thousand. This won't be so easy to do. We can't just pick any set of two thousand. All of these "balanced job complexes" are equally empowering, but whatever selection we come up with, the total number of hours devoted to X by our two thousand colleagues must be \(x\), the total number of hours devoted to Y must be \(y\), etc. We also have to take care that the qualitative mix is right. Suppose we need a half a million person-hours of clerical work done per year. (That's five hours per week, per person--a plausible figure.) But that clerical work is spread all over campus, and takes many different forms. We have to break up those 500,000 hours into bundles of tasks that one person can perform conscientiously over the course of a year. (If I am assigned five hours of clerical work a week, I'd like it to be in the same office and involve the same basic tasks. I don't want to be running all over the place each day or week or month, trying to do a hundred or so different things. I need time to get comfortable with my job.) And we have to insure that we have the appropriate number of people assigned to all the tasks that need to be done at the appropriate time and place. (We don't want two people showing up in the same office at the same time to do xeroxing, leaving another office shorthanded.) This is a very big job, constructing two thousand jobs, which, when performed conscientiously, will accomplish what our faculty and staff currently accomplish in a year.

Having constructed two thousand balanced job complexes that will get all the work done that needs to be done, we move on to the next step. We now have to decide which people will do which jobs. Doubtless we'll ask people what they prefer, and try to match people to preferences as best we can. Presumably we will also pay some attention to skills people have. I'm not sure how we will do this. There are two thousand people and two thousand balanced-job-complexes. Perhaps we'll shuffle the faculty names into a random list, ranked 1-2000, then have whoever gets the number one pick the job she wants, then have number two pick from the remaining jobs, then number three, etc. I'm not sure what we will do with those who are unhappy with their assignments. We can tell them wait until next year. (There will be another drawing.) I'm not sure what we will do with people who pick jobs they can't do very well. (I thought it would be fun to run a physics lab, but I'm confused by all the equipment.) Of course we can allow people, once assigned a job, to negotiate with colleagues, trading this or that task for another. The Faculty-Staff Council will have to approve any such switch, however, to be sure that the overall empowerment averages of the resulting jobs are still equal. (We don't want anyone trading a high empowerment task for a low empowerment one. That can lead to a concentration of empowering tasks in the hands of a few, and the emergence of a "controlling class." We don't want that to happen.)

Maybe there is some other way that all this can be done. I've been trying to follow Albert's suggested procedure, but the procedure is, as you see, rather complicated. Can we really expect an enterprise to undertake such a process? Every enterprise in the country? Albert is reassuring.
In real circumstances, he says, things might be done differently: "In real circumstances the procedures of job balancing are not precisely as we describe above, but involve a steady meshing and merging of tasks into jobs, with workers grading overall combinations and bringing these into accord with each other by tweaking the combinations far more fluidly than parceling out all tasks as of from some gigantic menu."

Hmmm? How exactly is this meshing and merging and tweaking going to take place? Will it be done by a subcommittee of the Faculty and Staff Council? By all of us? How? Albert doesn't tell us, but he is supremely confident: "Short of perfection, we can easily balance job complexes in each workplace quite well" (107).

Let us give him the benefit of the doubt. We're still not done, not by a long shot. For Parecon requires not only that job complexes be balanced within enterprises, but across enterprises as well. Loyola is only one university. There are thousands of universities in the U.S. There are also coal mines, construction companies and several million other firms. These may not all have comparable levels of average job empowerment. Indeed, the average at Loyola is likely high relative to all the other enterprises in the country. It's a clean, comfortable environment, with lots of stimulating intellectual activity. That's not fair. Something needs to be done.

Not to worry. In Parecon there is a "job complex committee for the economy as a whole" (109). This committee will take people who are working in below-average enterprises, and let them work part of the year in above-average enterprises. That sounds simple enough. To quote Albert, "If you work in a coal mine that is a 4, you get to work considerable time outside the mine in another venue, raising your average to 7."[5]

Since enterprises have different job-empowerment averages, this committee must now move people around, allowing everyone working in a lower-than-average empowerment enterprise average to work part of the year in a higher-than-average empowerment firms, while compelling those in higher-than-average empowerment firms to work part of the year in lower-than-average empowerment firms. (If Loyola has an above-average empowerment average--which is likely--all of us will likely be transferred elsewhere for part of the year, to make room for those in less empowering institutions to work at Loyola. Hopefully those firms won't be too far away. Hopefully the newcomers will master our tasks quickly.)

Sure, there will be complications. "It should be clear," says Albert, "that creating perfectly balanced job complexes is theoretically possible. But can it be done in real life situations?" "Of course not," he sensibly replies, "we are not talking about pure geometry or even the engineering of plastics. We are talking about people and social arrangements." Still, he is undaunted. The point is, it can be done quite well" (109).

Is there an argument to back up this bold assertion? Sort of. It can be done quite well, he says, for "there is no elite that bends everyone else to their will" (109-110).

**Equal Reward for Equal Effort**

Let's set aside our misgivings about balanced job complexes. Assume this can be done smoothly and efficiently and that everybody is reasonably well satisfied with the result. Workers may grumble here and there, but almost everybody agrees that their job complexes are equally fulfilling. If so, it is perfectly reasonable, is it not, to reward only according to hours worked?

No, that won't do, Albert correctly notes, for then there would be no motivation to work conscientiously. You'd make as much sitting at your desk and playing computer games as you'd make by drudging through that stack of files. No, there is going to have to be monitoring, to keep track of effort levels.
There are various ways this might be done, says Albert. All involve workers receiving an annual evaluation, but these may be either tight or loose. The choice is up to the enterprise. If loose, only hours worked will be specified. It is to be assumed that, apart from exceptional cases, everyone works at average intensity. (If you think you have worked exceptionally hard, you can petition the evaluation committee for a higher rating. If you think a workmate has been lax, you can petition that he be docked.) Alternatively, the evaluation committee will adopt a more precise rating system. You might be given a rating of 1.1 or 0.8, say, indicating that your effort was 10% above average, or 20% below average. This will entitle you to consume (next year) ten percent more, or 20% less, than someone who worked the same number of hours.\[6\]

There are problems with each of these solutions. If almost everyone gets an average rating, there is little motivation to work hard--particularly if some of your coworkers seem to be slacking off. Of course you can turn them in--or at least petition that they be disciplined--but that's an ugly business. How will the committee know if your complaint is valid? (Maybe you are pissed off at your colleague for having an affair with your wife.) There will have to be an investigation, witnesses called, etc. You will have to testify against your co-worker. He and his friends will not be happy with you. It won't be much fun coming to work.

What if someone claims to have worked harder than average? How will the committee evaluate that claim? If they tend to take the worker at her word, it's not hard to imagine the petitions multiplying, until we have Parecon-Wobegon: everyone is above average. (Albert recognizes this problem, says it will be dealt with in the next chapter, but, so far as I can tell, he never returns to it.)

What about tight monitoring? Isn't this the way it's done now, under capitalism? Workers are monitored closely. They get raises for doing well, and penalized if they don't.

No, says Albert, tight Parecon monitoring is not the same as capitalist monitoring. There are two major differences. First of all, you are evaluated on the basis of effort, not output, and secondly, you are evaluated by your peers, not by a boss.

It is true that in Parecon you are evaluated by your peers, and not by a supervisor answerable to the owners of the enterprise. This, in itself is not a problem. Workers are perfectly capable of monitoring their peers effectively--provided two conditions are met: a) they are motivated to do so, and b) the evaluation criteria can be readily applied. Unfortunately, neither of these conditions obtains under Parecon.

It is hard to see why workers in a Parecon enterprise would want to monitor their peers conscientiously. Suppose I've been elected to serve on the evaluation committee. Why should I exert myself conscientiously at my task as an evaluator? If I give my peers good ratings, they will be happy. If I give them bad ratings, they will be unhappy. There is nothing to be gained for myself or my co-workers by my being conscientious. Sure, if other enterprises are as reluctant as ours is to give out bad evaluations, national productivity will suffer--but my being strict will have only a miniscule effect on national productivity, whereas it will have a major (negative) effect on many coworkers near at hand.

Even if I wanted to be conscientious, could I be? In Parecon one is evaluated according to effort, not output. But how is the evaluation committee going to distinguish effort from output? If you make a lot of mistakes in your clerical task, how can our committee determine whether you are working hard, but are just not good at the task, or are simply not paying attention? And what if you disagree with our evaluation? What do we do?

Albert doesn't say much about this vital point, other than "arguments about who is doing how much work, how well, how hard, and with what degree of sympathy for coworkers are resolved by participants, or, when necessary, through council oversight"(196). He is adamant, however, that only effort should matter. "Whereas differences in contribution to output will derive from
differences in talent, training, job assignment, tools, luck and effort, . . . only effort merits compensation" (114). He seems not to realize that separating effort from output renders the evaluation committee's task impossible. (Am I daydreaming at my desk, or thinking really hard about the problem at hand?)

It should be clear that whichever version of the monitoring scheme is initially adopted, evaluators will tend to give everyone the same evaluation--above average, if possible, average if there are higher-order constraints against Parecon-Wobegon. Monitors have no good way of measuring effort, and little reason to be strict.

But if everyone gets the same evaluation, we are confronted with a motivational problem of the first order. The material payoff to the individual for working hard is minimal (an infinitesimally small increase in national productivity), whereas the payoff for slacking is significant (less stress, more time to be sociable with one's workmates). So we can anticipate a general reduction of effort overall. But this is a vicious circle--or rather, a vicious downward spiral. Some people slack off. All incomes fall. People become more alienated. The hard workers feel like fools. More people slack off. Incomes fall further. It is worth recalling the popular saying among Soviet workers, "They pretend to pay us. We pretend to work."

Notice, the problem here is not the depravity of human nature. Like Albert I'm relatively sanguine about human nature (although I do want some checks built into a system, just in case I'm too sanguine.) I think most people are willing to put in an honest day's work, particularly if the work is reasonably satisfying--as we are assuming it to be under Parecon. But hard work is, well, hard work. Unless one is exceptionally dedicated to a cause, one does not want to work hard when others aren't, nor does one want to harass those with whom one works. (Some people might work hard, regardless of what their fellow workers are doing, and some people may delight in harassing their colleagues, but most of us aren't like that. We are, after all, social animals.) To be sure, "moral incentives" sometimes work, the inner motivation of a revolutionary consciousness--but the history of twentieth century socialism should make us skeptical of relying on them too heavily.\[7\]

Non-Market Allocation.

Suppose my arguments so far are wrong. Suppose it is feasible to have a nationwide system of equally balanced job complexes for all. Suppose that trying to reward everyone strictly on the basis of effort does not lead to a marked decline in enterprise productivity. Suppose all are happy with their jobs and eager to do the best they can. We are now faced with the problem of deciding what our happy, balanced workforce will produce. Under capitalism, "the market" makes those determinations, via its "invisible hand." Surely we can now dispense with this impersonal mechanism, and replace it with a more effective and humane procedure. Surely human planning can do better than inhuman market forces.

Such a belief seemed eminently plausible in the aftermath of the Russian Revolution, when power passed, for the first time in history, into the hands of a party committed to constructing an economic system superior to capitalism. Indeed it was not a crazy idea. It was embraced by many of the best and brightest of the Left. Why not simply ascertain what our resources are and what people need, then put people to work in the requisite industries in the requisite numbers and have them produce what is needed?

But planning without markets failed--in the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, China, Cuba, North Korea. Everywhere it has been tried, it has failed. Of course, Albert knows this, but he has an explanation. Communist planning failed, not because planning cannot replace markets, but because Communist planning wasn't democratic; it wasn't truly participatory. A "controlling class" took over, and it was they who decided what people needed, and how it should be produced. The
consumers weren't able to articulate their wants or needs. The direct producers had no control over their work.

Moreover, the Bolsheviks didn't have computers. But we do. And we are committed to participatory democracy in ways that Leninists were not. Just because one form of planning failed doesn't mean that all forms must fail.

Fair enough. The failure of one form of planning does not entail the failure of all forms. But we must then ask, "How would you do it?" How would Parecon determine what should be produced? How would it bring people's needs and wants into alignment with what the workforce is willing and able to produce? To his credit, Albert does not sidestep this question, as do so many on the Left who remain hostile to the idea of "market socialism." He addresses it head-on.

Let's start with the first question. How would Parecon determine what people want? Albert's answer is straightforward. Ask them. Don't have people simply buy things, then hope that competitive pressures will see to it that what people want will be produced in the requisite quantities. That's a formula for exploitation, manipulation, environmental degradation and all sorts of other evils. Just ask them what they need. Let them tell us, and then let them tell us how hard they are willing to work. We'll negotiate back and forth until these two factors--demand and supply--are brought into balance.

Okay, let's try it. What do I do? Albert tells me that I must first go to my PC and access my consumption list from last year, which is stored in a central computer. I'll also be given a price list, and a figure indicating how much an hour's average labor will be worth this year. (It may be more than last year, if our economy has grown more productive, less if productivity has declined.) I then list what I want to consume next year, and how many hours I'm willing to work. The value of my consumption and the hours I'm willing to work must match. (If I've been given an above-average work rating, I multiply the national hourly average value by 1.1 or whatever has been deemed appropriate, to determine how many hours I need to work to cover my desired consumption.) I then send my list to my neighborhood consumption council, which will either approve or deny my proposal. Normally it will be approved, but, since my request will be posted publicly, "neighbors could express an opinion that a request was unwise" (152). (Isn't that a lot of scotch you've asked for? Wouldn't red wine be better for you?) Actually, I give them a bit more information. I'm also expected to write little notes--to provide "qualitative information about my reasons" for wanting various products. I will also write up a report for the local worker council, indicating my work preferences. These notes too will be posted. Albert doesn't think this will be burdensome: "This does not entail everyone writing long essays about their work and living conditions. It does mean that people will need to generate concise accounts that substitute for the fact that not everyone can personally experience every circumstance. Of course not every worker and consumer will use all this qualitative information in every calculation. But when there are odd changes in preferences of workers or consumers that someone does not understand or wants to explore further to comprehend what is behind a particular indicative price, the qualitative information is available for a check and clarification (127)."

That's the first step. Let's think about it for a moment. Forget about the notes. Let's think about the list. For some reason Parecon supporters don't have a problem with having to make a list of all the things one might want to consume during the course of a year. Albert reassures Barbara Ehrenreich, "In Parecon you have to spend some time over the course of a week or two entering your budget and interacting with the overall process. I suspect this won't take longer than people now spend doing their tax returns. . . ."

Well, let's see. Let's start with a week. Roughly, what would I like to consume next week? I drink three cups of coffee a day, so I'll need twenty-one cups of coffee. I take a variety of vitamin pills each morning. Those are easy enough to multiply by seven. I sometimes eat cereal for breakfast. That'll require some sugar and some milk. How much sugar? How much milk? Let me think about
that. Sometimes I scramble an egg. That'll require some salt, pepper, butter. Sometimes I have some bacon . . . Hmm--I'm only in the first half-hour of the day. This is getting complicated. I often drive to school to teach and attend meetings. How many trips do I anticipate this week? How much gas will I need? Eventually I'll need an oil change and a new oil filter and, with winter coming on, new set of spark plugs, and . . . Or maybe I'll take the bus. But how do I figure that? Bus-miles used? (I'll definitely need to attach a note to this one, because it will matter whether the route I take is well-traveled and hence has lots of passengers to defray the cost, or whether there are usually only a couple of us on it.)

"Wait, wait!!" Albert and company will respond. "Just look at last year's list. You don't have to start from scratch. Just estimate your changes."

Well, that does make matters a bit easier. (It would seem that at some point I would have had to construct an initial list--but let that reservation slide.) I look at last year's list. I see that I consumed two hundred and twelve eggs last year, eleven pounds of bacon, two pound of salt, . . . . one hundred forty-seven gallons of gasoline, . . . I see I also bought two new pairs of pants, a pair of shoes, fifteen bars of soap . . . I had to replace my computer. I used twenty-four highlighters, thirty reams of computer paper. Wow! This is a pretty long list! It goes on for pages and pages. It's hard to believe I consumed all that stuff in just one year.

Okay, I have my list of last year's consumption. It took awhile to print out, listing as it did all the food, clothing, housing expenses, entertainment, travel, books, magazines, cleaning supplies, gifts, etc., etc., etc. that I purchased last year. Now I have to think about the coming year.

What would I like to consume this coming year? I've been thinking about giving up meat, so that gives me some options. I can compare what I spent on bacon with what I might spend on . . . what? Maybe soybeans. Let's see--back to the computer to get their anticipated price per pound. Hmmm, I wonder how many pounds I'll need. . . . I just remembered, there are some birthdays coming up. What did I spend on birthday gifts last year? What did I buy anyway? I'll have to search back through the list. (Presumably I tagged as gifts when I bought them all the items purchased as gifts, so my computer's search engine can locate them quickly.) How much did I spend? What do I want to buy this year--for birthdays, Christmas, wedding anniversary?

"Please note," says Albert, "this does not mean that every individual must specify how many units of every single product they need down to size, style and color." Whew, that's a relief. But then what do I specify? Birthday gifts? A nice sweater for my wife?

We have a problem here. If I don't specify what gifts I want, including such details as size, style and color, how are the producers going to know what to produce? Ehrenreich worried about this. "Call me vain, petty, capitalist running dog, but I certainly don't want a bunch of committees deciding how long skirts will be or what lipstick colors will be available."[11]

Albert's reply? "Applying all this to skirts, we should want the tastes and preferences of all workers and consumers and particularly of people who wear them and of those who produce skirts to interactively proportionately influence the length and color, as well as their number and composition, their method of production, and so on--instead of profit seeking determining the result."[12]

Yeah, well . . . but Albert seems to have missed a basic point. How will the producers know what kind of skirt Ehrenreich wants or the kind of sweater I'd like to give my wife if we don't specify these details on our consumption-preference list? Albert says I'll "interactively, proportionately influence" what will be produced. But how? I guess we're supposed to attach notes to the producers--but that's a lot of notes, not to mention a lot of foresight.

Maybe I'm just being picky. Maybe most people will just look at last year's list and make only a few changes. (Of course there are 100 million households in the U.S., so even "a few" will be millions, but never mind. Let's move on.) What next? Well, the various consumer and worker
councils, using their computers, and helped out by facilitation boards, aggregate all this information, to see if what people want to consume matches what they propose to do, qualitatively and quantitatively, at the workplace. If, for everything that is desired, there are people willing to work long enough in the appropriate production facilities to produce it, then the process comes to an end.

If it doesn't? (Albert doesn't expect it to, nor should we.) Well--our lists will be returned to us. The prices have been changed--raised for things for which there is excess demand, lowered for those for which there is a surplus. "At this point," says Albert, "consumers reassess their requests and most often shift their requests for goods in excess demand toward those whose indicative prices have fallen because they were in excess supply" (131). That is to say, we'll have to redo our lists! All of us--for if supply and demand fail to match for any of the hundreds (thousands?) of items on a person's list, the prices will change, and so one's consumption request will no longer equal one's work offer.

So we try again. Then again. Then again. . . . After several iterations, Albert assures us, there will be convergence. Supply and demand for almost all items will come into balance. Now we can vote. In his example of "a typical planning process," the iteration process goes back and forth five times, i.e., all 100 million of us are asked to redo our calculations five times. (It's not clear what happens to people who get sick of all this. I guess they just get what the consumer council decides is best for them.) Anyway, after five iterations, five plans are set out for a vote. "What would distinguish the five plans is that each would entail slightly different total product, work expended, average consumption and average investment. Everyone affected would then vote, as units, for one of these five feasible plans" (138).

I'm not sure what voting "as a unit" means, but so far as I can tell, the plans would look something like this: Plan A would allow for $11 trillion worth of production, $8 trillion of which will be consumer goods, $3 trillion investment (roughly the U. S. figures for last year), with an average workweek of, say, 35 hours. Plan B would let us consume more, say $8.5 trillion, invest less, say $2.5 trillion, and work the same. Plan C would set consumption at $8.5 trillion, keep investment at $3 trillion, but raise the average workload to 36 hours. There will be two additional plans, but you get the picture.

What is a committed voter to do? Well, you might wonder whether the local swimming pool your village council requested is included in one or more of these plans. No problem. Get on your computer and find out. You recall some discussion in the newspaper about a solar energy project in Nevada. Did that make it into one or more of these budgets? Check and see. Play around with those $11 trillion budgets for a few days, then make a responsible choice. Take this seriously. After all, this is an allocation determined democratically by the people, not by blind market forces. This is the brave new world for which so many have struggled for so long.

I've been quoting from Albert to assure the reader that I am not making this up. I am not caricaturing his position. I have been trying to imagine what Albert's proposals would require, concretely, if we tried to implement them. Albert is confident that all this would work, and would involve, moreover, only a week or two of one's time, about what it takes to do one's taxes. The results would be "stupendously superior" to what we now get under capitalism, or would get under market socialism.

I don't think so.

The Parecon Phenomena

I've argued that all three of the fundamental building blocks of Parecon are hopelessly flawed. It is inconceivable to me that such a system would work. It is hard for me to imagine any rational being thinking otherwise. But even if Parecon were viable, there is another question to ask: Why
would anyone want to live in such a system? It is a system obsessed with comparison (Is your job complex more empowering than mine?), with monitoring (You are not working at average intensity, mate--get with the program), with the details of consumption (How many rolls of toilet paper will I need next year? Why are some of my neighbors still using the kind not made of recycled paper?). Albert thinks all this interaction promotes solidarity: "Participatory planning does have stupendous virtues compared to either markets or central planning. Participatory planning produces solidarity by creating conditions in which to get ahead actors must take into account the well being of those who produce what they consume or consume what they produce."[14]"

Solidarity—or a climate that makes Mao's Cultural Revolution look like a picnic in the park?

Two Impolite Questions

It's an impolite question, but it has to be asked. Why have Chomsky, et al. endorsed such nonsense?

I can only speculate. I have no direct knowledge of their relationships to Albert. I know that Chomsky has been a long-time supporter of South End Press. I presume that he and Albert are friends. South End Press has published some of his works, and also those of Roy, Zinn and Bagdikian. I presume Albert asked them for endorsements. It's hard to say no to a friend, or to someone who has contributed significantly to the resurgent opposition to global capitalism. I could be wrong, but I have a hard time believing that many (any?) of the high-profiled endorsers of this book have actually read it--at least not closely.

It is not an easy read. It is very repetitious. And you have to struggle through sentences such as this one:

How much mid-term adjusting to do--rather than just waiting for the new planning period to get inputs and outputs all "perfect" again; and then how much of that mid-term adjusting to do simply by rationing, i.e. adjusting consumption only; how much to do by adjusting production of the initial item affected and/or of other items that are inputs, etc.; and which of the various options to use in any part of an adjustment, including whether or not to recalibrate prices, are all practical issues to be decided by those who work and consume in a participatory economy following general norms and procedures applicable in specific cases, though not via one single right norm or procedure that must be followed in all cases and in all parecons, we would guess (280).

I should note that Chomsky's "endorsement" is carefully worded. The book, he says, "merits close attention, debate and action." He's mostly right on that score. Left critics of market socialism have long been pressed to offer an alternative, something other than the discredited Soviet model of central planning. Most have avoided the question or responded with vague generalities, but not Albert. It is instructive to see what a bright, committed Leftist can come up with. His answer does merit attention.

Chomsky also urges debate. That's what I'm offering here. I don't know about "action," however. It is not clear what "action" might be inspired by Albert's book. Albert devoted precisely a page and half of his three hundred and two page treatise (the last page and a half) to the question of "attainment." There exists, he says, "a broad set of strategic guidelines, aims, programs, structures, and steps, each of which can evidently be accomplished, and which together reveal a scenario that could end in a participatory economy." However, "we cannot undertake such a discussion here" (302).

Let me ask another impolite question. Why does Michael Albert believe such nonsense? Again I can only speculate.
Albert is captivated by the concept of a non-market society. Not without reason. Any smart, sensitive person who looks at the world today is bound to be appalled by what he sees. Such a person will notice quickly enough that the dominant economic system has something to do with the mess we are in. Since this system is routinely identified as a "free-market" economy, it is natural to turn one's attention to the workings of that mysterious entity, "the market," and to wonder about the possibility of a more rational, more desirable society in which cooperation replaces competition and individuals are motivated by something other than insecurity and greed. I suggest that Albert was captivated by this vision early on. I understand the appeal of this vision. I've felt it myself. Who on the Left has not?

Once one begins thinking about and discussing a society based on principles of solidarity, one immediately encounters the human-nature skeptics. Albert is no exception. He recounts his long debates with fellow students at MIT in the late sixties, and the recurring refrain, "People are greedy, violent animals, so what more can you expect? Let me go back to my classes, let me avoid all this distraction. Stop berating me with it. There's nothing I or anyone can do" (289-90). One learns how to counter their arguments. Existing patterns of injustice are not the ineluctable outcomes of a fixed and unchanging "human nature," rendering any attempt at change impossible. As any anthropologist will attest, there have been societies in the past (and some still in existence) where people are not particularly greedy, or obsessed with consumption, and the prime motivation for work is social—the exercise of one's ability for the good of the collective.

If human nature is not an insurmountable obstacle, then a non-market society is theoretically possible. This is a significant conclusion, but of course Albert needs more than that. *Is a non-market economy possible for a large, technologically developed society such as our own?* (The anthropological evidence derives from more "primitive" societies.) Specifically, is an economy with Parecon's basic features theoretically possible? This was the next challenge he had to face. And face it he did, with the help of his long-time friend and collaborator, economist Robin Hahnel. In their 1991 book, *The Political Economy of Participatory Economics* (Princeton University Press) they set out a formal model of Parecon, analogous to the formal models of capitalist and centrally-planned economies that have been developed by other economists, complete with the many equations (and assumptions) typical of such models. They then demonstrated its Pareto-optimality. That is to say, they did for Parecon what the mathematical economists have done for capitalism—demonstrated that a stylized, simplified model of the system will tend toward perfect efficiency.

At this point (I conjecture) Albert had become so committed to his project that there was no turning back. What is possible in theory must be possible in practice. And, moreover, given its democratic, egalitarian foundations, it must be stupendously superior to both centrally-planned and market economies. Of course, these claims do not follow from a mathematical proof of theoretical efficiency. After all, not only *laissez-faire* capitalism but a Soviet-style centrally planned economy can be shown to be efficient if enough simplifying assumptions are made. It is here, I have argued, that Albert's project collapses. Parecon would not work in practice. Which is just as well, for if by some chance it did, it would not be a system under which any of us would want to live.

Why will he not recognize this? As I have shown, it doesn't take much imagination to see how impossible it would be to implement *in practice* any of the three basic features of the model. I can no longer offer a rationale reconstruction of Albert's thinking. But the words of a co-worker from South End Press seem significant: "Michael never gives up. He's the visionary and he's the bulldog. I don't think I know anybody more tenacious." Against an *idée fixe* rational argument and common sense are powerless.
Conclusion

Where does this leave us? Must we give up on the dream of a humane future beyond capitalism? I think not—but we must think hard about the viability of the alternatives we propose. We must also pay attention to the ethical foundations of our proposals.

In particular, we should reject the obsessive egalitarianism that underlies the Parecon proposal. This strict egalitarianism is morally problematic. It undercuts the generosity of spirit a socialist ethic should promote. Suppose, for example, that I am happy with my work and with my level of consumption. Then I learn that you got more than I did without working any harder. May I take vicarious pleasure in your good fortune? May I fantasize that I too might one day get lucky? If your greater income is a reward for your greater contribution, may I feel good that you are so honored. May I consider honing my own talents so that I too might be rewarded more? Not if I'm committed to the Parecon principle. If you got more than me without working any harder, I am a victim of injustice. Righteous indignation is the appropriate response, not pleasure or inspiration. I experience your success as my humiliation. This is not an ethic of solidarity.

Strict egalitarianism is the ethic of squabbling siblings. (Gary got a bigger piece of pie than me. That's not fair! Gary gets to stay up later than me. That's not fair! Dad likes Gary better than me. That's not fair!) It is not an ethical principle that should command our allegiance. If we want to construct an economically viable, ethically desirable, alternative to capitalism, we should distance ourselves not only from Albert's obsessive egalitarianism, but also from his implacable hostility to markets: "Markets aren't a little bad, or even just very bad in some contexts. Instead, in all contexts, markets instill anti-social motivations in buyers and sellers, misprice items that are exchanged, misdirect aims regarding what to produce in what quantities and by what means, mis-remunerates producers, introduces class divisions and class rule, and embody an imperial logic that spreads itself throughout economic life."

Markets indeed have defects, but they have virtues as well. We need to think dialectically about markets. Markets are democratic (in that they respond to consumer preferences), and they are undemocratic, (since they tend to exacerbate income inequality). Markets enhance the space of individual freedom, (since consumer choices are not subject the approval of others), and they contract the space of individual freedom, (since market choices often have third-party effects). Markets provide incentives for constructive behavior (efficient use of resources, innovation) and for destructive behavior (consumer manipulation, disregard of ecological consequences). Neither market fundamentalism nor market rejectionism is an appropriate response to the reality of economic complexity.

God knows, we do not want to live in a world dominated by rapacious, unaccountable economic institutions that pit worker against worker, drive levels of inequality to almost unimaginable levels, and are in the process of devastating the ecology of the planet. We need a better way. But a life preoccupied with negotiating work complexes, forecasting one's future consumption, revising lists, scrutinizing the consumption lists of one's neighbors, posting notes on the qualitative aspects of desired purchases, voting on national plans vastly more complicated than the Federal Budget is not the answer.

This is not the place to defend an alternative proposal, one that avoids obsessive egalitarianism and allows for a regulated market, but interested readers might want to check out my After Capitalism.

Notes
Michael Albert, *Parecon: Life After Capitalism* (London: Verso, 2003); the Amazon.com figure was mentioned in a review of *Parecon* by Kevin Donegan that appeared in the *Los Angeles Times*, March 17, 2003. This review is posted on the Parecon website, www.zmag.org/parecon.


The endorsements by Chomsky and Roy are on the amazon.com listing for *Parecon*. Chomsky's also appears on the book's jacket, along with those of Zinn and Bagdikian.

This figure is from the Los Angeles Times review of *Parecon* posted on the Parecon website.

*Parecon*, p. 108. There are two technical problems here that Albert overlooks. If enterprises construct their own ranking scales, there is no reason to suppose that they are comparable. A 4 in coal mine may or may not be worse than a 7 at Loyola. To overcome this problem, some sort of uniform national task list would have to be constructed. This list, moreover (the second technical problem) must employ a cardinal ranking, not simply an ordinal one. That is, the ranking must be based on some "unit of empowerment," so that we can say, for example, a 4-level task is not just more empowering than a 3-level task, but that the size of the empowerment differential is the same as that between a 40-level task and a 41 level task.

These mechanisms are discussed in *Parecon*, pp. 115-116. See also pp. 196-97.

Recall the disaster of China's "Great Leap Forward" in 1958-60, the economic setback attendant its Cultural Revolution a few years later, and the catastrophic failure of Cuba's attempt at a ten-million ton sugar harvest in 1970.

Not everyone avoids this issue. For a survey of the most significant models of democratic non-market socialism, see *Building Socialism Theoretically: Alternatives to Capitalism and the Invisible Hand*, "Special Issue of Science and Society* (Spring 2002), which includes contributions by Al Campbell, Paul Cockshott and Allin Cottrell, Pat Devine, and David Laibman, as well as by Albert and his close associate Robin Hahnel. The various contributors set out their own models and comment on the others.

Cf. *Parecon*, pp. 129-130. My account here simplifies his somewhat, since it ignore collective consumption. Collective consumption adds another layer of complication to a system that is (as we shall see) already overburdened with complexity.

Ehrenreich interview.

Ehrenreich interview.


Albert asserts that there will be convergence, although it is unclear why there should be. Real world markets don't always converge. (Farmers overplant. Supply exceeds demand. Grain prices fall. Farmers cut back production. Demand exceeds supply. Prices soar. Farmers overplant, etc.) Markets are useful, not because they bring supply and demand into alignment over time, but because provide useful information to producers as to the direction of the imbalance and effective motivation to producers to act on this information.

Ehrenreich interview.

Quote in the *Los Angeles Times* review of *Parecon*.


It is interesting to note that Marx was not an egalitarian, obsessive or otherwise. That famous slogan, "from each according to his ability, to each according to his need" is
strikingly inegalitarian. People have different abilities. People have different needs. There is not even a hint in Marx that those with greater needs should work more than those with lesser needs so as to compensate for their greater consumption.

If we look at Marx's writings, particularly his early manuscripts, we find them suffused with moral concepts (unalienated labor, the human being as a "species being," human beings with "emancipated senses"), but economic equality is not one of them. On the contrary, Marx warned against the leveling impulse of a "crude and unthinking communism" which "wants to abstract from talent, etc., by force," bringing everyone down to a "preconceived minimum." This "universal envy . . . is only the disguised form in which greed reestablishes and satisfies itself in another way." ("Private Property and Communism," in his Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844.)

Of course citing Marx will not move Albert, who no longer considers himself a Marxist or even a socialist. (See his debate with Alix Callinicos and his "Is Socialism Still on the Agenda?" both posted on the Parecon website.) Still, the Marxian ethical framework should be taken seriously, for it seems to me much richer and more satisfactory than the obsessive egalitarianism of Parecon.

[18] Ehrenreich interview.

Critique Without Comprehension

February 24, 2006

By Michael Albert

For The review this essay replies to
Please see Schweickart: Nonsense On Stilts

Parecon Phenomenon 1:
Serious Thought Or Manipulated Irrationality?

In David Schweickart's view, my book Parecon: Life After Capitalism is not just nonsense but nonsense on stilts. Strangely, Schweickart, though a philosopher, largely ignores the historical and social evidence and argument and particularly the ethical precepts offered on behalf of rejecting capitalism and market economies of any kind. He doesn't question, or for that matter even address parecon's injunction to seek economic classlessness via placing solidarity, diversity, equity, and self management at the heart of both judging and choosing economic institutions. Instead, Schweickart overwhelmingly focuses on whether participatory economics can function at all.

Schweickart asserts not only that the Verso published book is "terrible," but, more important, that the entire economic model called participatory economics is "hopelessly, irredeemably flawed" to the point that any leftist should immediately see it is worthless. Feeling thusly, he doesn't understand the "parecon phenomena" and he spends time wondering why growing numbers of leftists are urging its merits and trying to refine and improve its substance. I will ignore the odd idea that this growing support and involvement reflects that I am some kind of tireless Svengali who has hoodwinked not only my friends, but the many parecon advocates whom I don't know, the international publishers, etc., and that I have even hoodwinked myself (out of unrestrained hope), all to a point of slavish fixation that is "immune to common sense or reason." For Schweickart, we are all advocating something only a deluded fool wouldn't quickly dismiss. It seems better, as well as less demeaning to myself and others, for me to assume that there is support, and also criticism, and that I and others rationally (rather than slavishly) advocate and are trying to improve the model, even though Schweickart thinks no one rational would do so.

In any event, Schweickart is entirely correct that parecon centrally includes "balanced job complexes" which seek to equilibrate jobs for their empowerment effects in order to eliminate a class division between what I call the coordinator class of empowered employees including managers, lawyers, engineers, etc., and more typical workers. Strangely, Schweickart never mentions this class analysis aspect of parecon, though he, like me, is a member of the class it pinpoints. Schweickart is also right, however, that parecon includes "remuneration for duration, intensity, and onerousness of work" in order to attain equitable distribution of income. And he is right, as well, that parecon includes "participatory planning" in pursuit of self managed and classless allocation that reflects workers' and consumers' needs. If Schweickart is correct that these three features that he focuses on are not viable and/or not worthy, then he is also correct that the overall model is flawed. Parecon does rest on these legs, which he thinks he has cut out from under it.
Balanced Job Complexes:
Classless Division of Labor or Crazy Chaos?

Schweickart starts with balanced job complexes. He doesn't question my arguments that they are necessary to avoid class division, nor does he suggest that having balanced job complexes would hurt productivity or treat people unfairly - which are concerns I deal with at length in the book. Instead, Schweickart urges that balanced job complexes are transparently and self evidently impossible to implement. In his view, moreover, this is so obvious that only the deluded (or self delusional) would think otherwise.

To make this case, Schweickart first quotes a passage in which I describe some tasks as being more empowering and others as being less empowering, employing a hypothetical ranking of 1 - 20 to explain the abstract claim. He then ridicules the idiocy of thinking that we could arrive at balanced job complexes in a large firm by showing how at his university, as an example, given the virtually innumerable tasks it encompasses, first carefully ranking every task, and then second, painstakingly combining bunches of tasks to arrive at the same mathematical average for every job we constructed, would be very nearly infinitely time consuming and confusion inspiring. He does note in passing that I made clear in the book that the numeric ranking was only to explain the underlying idea and show the conceptual possibility of jobs composed of bundles of tasks such that each job was comparable in its empowerment effects to all others - and that I did not propose this mathematical ranking description to describe a social procedure for actually arriving at such a goal, which I explicitly said it was not. Nonetheless, Schweickart treated the mathematical ranking example as a social procedure for about 20% of his long review. It was easy to ridicule taken that way, but that ridicule has no bearing on actual parecon prospects.

So how do balanced job complexes persist year to year, in a parecon? Well, as Schweickart notes, in a functioning parecon we have balanced job complexes already and so for maintenance we are only talking about changes to preserve or to realign their balance from year to year. Suppose a new technology is put in place, or some new realization about existing options regarding work arises. If the change is significant in its empowerment implications, we must then shift a few tasks in accord, in some division inside some workplace, or perhaps for a whole workplace, or even across workplaces. This is obviously not so difficult. Jobs alter all the time in any kind of economy, much more so than this. A yearly or bi-yearly session of a workers council in an industry, a workplace, or in a division, guided by reports from workers who are assigned to assess changing conditions as part of their overall responsibilities, could certainly non disruptively propose such refinements to workers councils. But this isn't what Schweickart found fault with. Rather, he doubts the possibility of getting balance the first time around, at the outset, from what we have now. And Schweickart is quite right that that isn't easy, which doesn't mean, however, that it shouldn't be done.

One way to think of this is to realize that the pre-capitalist system of artisanal craft power was unraveled by Taylorist practice, breaking down skilled (somewhat balanced) jobs into their minute tasks, in order to re-construct them on the basis of the hierarchical control requirements of a class system. If capitalism can adapt jobs to increase inequality and especially control by a few, why can't a post capitalist economy re-combine components to make up new jobs that balance empowerment effects of work to produce social classlessness? For example, consider bus drivers and transit planning. Why couldn't bus drivers or other transit workers have training to do transit planning as well as to drive? It really isn't hard in industries to see steps on the road to generating balance.

Take, as Schweickart suggests, his own university, Loyola. If, we assume it is as now, but one wishes to move from that corporate structure to an array of balanced job complexes, what has to happen? Well, quite a lot. We can even make it more urgent. Take the Bolivarian University in
Venezuela set up precisely to evidence new ways of organizing an educational institution. Suppose they want to eliminate internal class division. What should they, or Loyola, do?

Well, for people who have had a lifetime of rote and tedious work to begin doing more empowering work, may entail, in part, some training. So one quick and relatively straightforward innovation is to institute classes for employees, not just for students. The students and faculty can pick up some of the then unassigned labor due to gardeners, custodians, waiters, and secretaries, taking some classes. Professors, can immediately do some or all of their own phoning, Xeroxing, and so on, so their secretaries can have time to pursue other tasks. For that matter, professors can even wield a broom, not just a computer mouse or joystick.

But how does the division of labor get to be not just somewhat improved, but fully balanced? Not in a gigantic rush, that's for sure. And not by some idiotic mechanical calculation process, that's also for sure. Transition involves experimentation in job definition. It involves a flow of changes that give those doing only cushy and empowering work steadily more of the socially necessary but rote tasks, while giving some of their cushy and empowering labor over to those who were previously excluded. Does this entail that the custodian teaches quantum theory, right off, or even ever? No. But the custodian may well, perhaps with a little training, perhaps not even needing that, do some of the labor that deans or heads of faculty now do - or would do once the university is more libertarian about education and other functions - and perhaps in time she might also teach, in one department or another, or not.

The point is, if you look down the road some years from when serious redesign in pursuit of balanced job complexes begins, balanced job complexes can be attained and, moreover, the people who work at the new Loyola can have had enriching education in their youth - rather than about 80% being taught mostly to endure boredom and take orders, and 20% being taught productive skills and also to feel superior. In the new Loyola all who work there are equipped to participate cooperatively and equitably in balanced jobs, and a few will not dominate the rest. And the same goes for other workplaces. We don't all do everything, of course. None of us do things beyond our capacities, naturally. We all do, however, do some activity that is empowering and some that is not, in a socially balanced mix.

In other words, if the Bolivarian University says it wants self management and equity - or a bit further in the future if Loyola does - but it keeps a division of labor in which 80% of the workforce obeys orders and follows agendas and 20% gives orders and creates agendas, then day by day, even in large and formally democratic assemblies, the 20% will dominate outcomes, and they will also aggressively reward themselves, seeing themselves as more worthy. To avoid that class division and all the alienation, subordination, and turmoil that goes with it, one wants to create a situation in which all the employees by virtue of their balanced work conditions - as well as sensible prior training - are comparably empowered. One does not want to create a condition in which some employees are highly empowered and others are overwhelmingly made passive. That's the reason for balanced job complexes. Expertise is not eliminated, or reduced, but is expanded by greatly enlarging society's interest in giving all its citizens serious educational opportunities. What is eliminated is some people monopolizing empowering tasks, while other people are made subordinate by their solely rote and repetitive labors. Without balanced job complexes, and supposing capitalists are out of the picture, it seems to me that we necessarily have coordinator class rule. With balanced job complexes, we can have classlessness. The task, if this claim is correct, is, to my eyes, not to belittle the possibility of balancing job complexes by magnifying unreal weaknesses, but to refine parecon's logic and methods so they become ever more viable. Saying that we can't eliminate monopolization of empowering tasks into few jobs is tantamount, I think, to saying TINA, there is no alternative - not there is no alternative to capitalism, but there is
no alternative to class rule. Schweickart is right that my tendency is to work damn hard to discover ways to thwart that claim, though I don’t think that means I am delusional or irrational.

Are balanced job complexes hard to reach from the capitalist economies that we now inhabit? Of course they are. Does one reach them by some kind of mechanical process that seeks mathematical perfection over night, of for that matter, ever? Of course not. Nor have I ever suggested it, though I welcome Schweickart’s review for making me be very explicit, again. We move toward balance by making changes in a social adjustment, many steps undertaken over considerable time, first won by movements seeking reforms, but then later enacted by self managing workers' and consumers' councils. And we don't fetishize some kind of abstract perfection at any point in the process, of course, but we stop adjusting when workers collectively (in each venue) feel that any further tinkering would be a waste of precious time relative to minor gains still to be had.

Once we have balanced job complexes, are they hard to maintain and adjust? No, there is no reason to think that is the case. In fact, it is instead plausible that it is far harder to continually realign jobs to keep most people subordinate and a few people empowered, roughly in a four to one ratio, despite that doing so diminishes productivity as well as being horribly unjust, than it will be to keep all jobs equitably balanced up to a socially agreed condition conducive to self managed participation, and which enhances productivity and attains classlessness. So, balanced job complexes will not only be vastly more just and humane than corporate divisions of labor (whether the latter are chosen on their own "merits" or imposed by markets or central planning or just grudgingly accepted as "unavoidable"), but, as a bonus, and contrary to Schweickart’s ridicule, balanced job complexes will also be easier to maintain.

Schweickart rightly notes that even beyond seeking balanced job complexes inside each firm, parecon requires that job complexes also be balanced across them. He points out that Loyola is "a clean, comfortable environment, with lots of stimulating intellectual activity. That's not fair. Something needs to be done." I think he means this to be sarcastic, but I agree with the sentiment, something does need to be done, and for two reasons.

First, if we are going to have some people doing much cleaner, more comfortable, and more stimulating labor, and other people doing more debilitating, dangerous, and rote labor, we should not pay the former more, as now, or even pay them all the same, as many progressives might suggest. To have remuneration that is equitable, we should pay the folks who endure worse conditions more to make up for the greater sacrifice involved in their pursuits. Second, even if we initially decided we would remunerate justly, a group of what I call coordinators with significantly and consistently more empowering economic conditions would tend to socially and organizationally dominate workers who were in contrast made menial and subservient by their more rote pursuits. Such a dominant class would steadily and increasingly push the economy toward their own advancement, including subverting the prior socially valid payment decision until it was literally reversed - as we see all around us and throughout history, in all market systems.

The point is, if an economy has some workplaces that are highly empowering, though with average job complexes inside, and other workplaces that are highly disempowering, again with average job complexes inside, in time we will have a class that occupies the former workplaces, doing little but empowered labor, and a class that inhabits the latter workplaces, doing little but rote labor. In this socially unbalanced situation, instead of a university's custodians being part of the university staff so that balanced job complexes in the university incorporated a share of rote tasks - they would be employed in a custodian's firm and would work in the university only on contract. And more, the custodian's firm's managers would be contracted day workers there, hired from a firm that is composed only of managers. Once again, we would have the class division between the empowered
and disempowered, though now they would be officially employed in two entirely separate sectors of workplaces, though they would do their functions throughout the economy.

In other words, if we want an economy which doesn't elevate one sector to a dominant position above the rest by virtue of unequally empowering economic roles, which is to say, if we want an economy without class rule, then we need to have a division of labor which gives everyone sufficient confidence, social skills, and habits of involvement and of decision making, of one sort or another, to participate fully and fairly in overall decision making. We don't want a coordinator class who overwhelmingly set agendas, design conditions, administer outcomes, govern information flow, and pay themselves far more, while everyone else labors below.

I agree with Schweickart that most professors at Loyola will likely at first resist the idea of balanced job complexes, and also of remuneration for effort, exactly as Schweickart rejects them. Some will do it out of sincere conviction that these approaches can't work or would lead to bad outcomes. For others their response will reflect their class interests narrowing their gaze, juggling their thoughts, and biasing their values.

Schweickart ridicules having balanced job complexes, saying that to fully have them "since enterprises have different job-empowerment averages," some method would have to "move people around, allowing everyone working in a lower-than-average empowerment enterprise to work [part time] in a higher-than average empowerment firms, while compelling those in higher-than-average empowerment firms to work [part time] in lower-than-average empowerment firms." I am tempted to say, and this kind of reply is possible over and over to Schweickart's concerns, is this really so bad, even as Schweickart tilts it, as compared to having a corporate division of labor where 80% must be structurally compelled to obey and endure? But, in fact, parecon doesn't have to justify itself only by virtue of how abysmal the corporate, market, alternatives are. Attaining cross firm balance not according to some mathematical perfection, but in a social manner acceptable to the population involved, really isn't unduly complex.

There are plenty of examples in the book. Imagine, for one, a coal mine. Let's suppose that technical innovations haven't yet significantly improved the empowerment implications of working at the coal mine so that working there still involves doing tasks way below the social average empowerment level. What happens?

Well, you can't work in the coal mine full time. Let's say society has a thirty hour week, or whatever the population of worker/consumers arrives at given its desires for consumption as against its desires for leisure - which, by the way, is a self managed choice in a parecon whereas market systems compel accumulation and steadily increase workloads regardless of desires. In addition to working in the coal mine part time, you will work elsewhere, perhaps in your neighborhood, perhaps in any of a number of firms that are paired off with the coal mine, part time as well. These other pursuits will be at higher empowerment levels, allowing a cumulative average. And the same goes in reverse, if you work at Loyola, assuming it has significantly excessive empowerment effects in its balanced job complex, you can also only work there so many hours a week. You would have to fill out your work load with other tasks, less empowering, maybe in your neighborhood, or in nearby firms, etc. Of course scheduling is flexible, it isn't as if you have to work in two places each day, or even each week, but only on average over time. Once we have balanced job complexes across firms, is there need for a change in people's overall jobs at times? Sure, suppose in a parecon new technologies significantly raise the quality of life and empowerment effects of working at a coal mine, which presumably would be a priority not only for the miners, but for the whole population in order to most effectively raise the social average job complex across all society. In that case, the workers in the mine would face new conditions and their overall job would adapt.
What makes all this seem absurd to Schweickart, assuming it is not class blinders, is his thinking that balancing jobs involves some kind of precise mathematical equilibration - despite what I tried to convey in the book. Once that characterization is removed, however, and once one sees past his cataloging vast numbers of tasks, etc., there is really nothing so complex or daunting about maintaining balanced job complexes, even across firms. It will be, I would wager, far simpler for pareconish agencies to help people find a pair of workplaces with an over all total balanced job complex, than for laborers in market economies to find two or three jobs of any kind, however degrading, in an environment of competition and greed, working incredibly long hours at only onerous tasks and for exploitative wages in order to attain incomes only a fraction of the payment that managers and other coordinator class members get for doing way less actual labor. Similarly, combining tasks into jobs equitably, for self management, is no harder - though far more antithetical to human needs - than combining tasks inequitably, for hierarchical control. Schweickart doesn't see this only because the Taylorist hierarchicalization process is long past, and the pareconist de-hierarchicalization process is still in our future.

So, yes, Schweickart is correct that it is difficult to arrive at balanced job complexes for the first time in a complex economy. Of course it is. But maintenance of balanced job complexes becomes far less difficult after attaining balance, though still, not trivial, to be sure. But what's the alternative? Class division? Class rule? Not to mention the tremendous and ongoing difficulty of enforcing unjust relations and coercing obedience and output from wage slaves forced into horribly unbalanced job complexes?

I therefore think arriving at balanced job complexes and then maintaining them is worth some trouble, both to avoid class rule, and, put more positively, to attain self management. This is my deluded commitment. The book, Parecon, and many other writings as well, give far more evidence and supporting argument, of course, then I can provide in this reply, regarding possibility as well as purpose - the last of which Schweickart completely ignores. But, to use an ironic phrase, the bottom line is, once balanced job complexes are established, it will be much easier, less burdensome, and less of a drain on output, to modestly refine jobs every year to account for changes in empowerment effects, then it is to enforce and maintain hierarchical job structures that impose servitude on most laborers so that a minority can alone enjoy "cleaner, more comfortable, more stimulating" and especially more empowering circumstances.

**Parecon's Remuneration: Equitable Motivation Or Incentive Nightmare?**

Moving on to remuneration for labor, the problem Schweickart raises owes primarily to confusion, I suspect, though others who earn relatively high incomes for doing very cushy work will likely have class-rooted problems with policies seeking the new remuneration norm. Schweickart, at any rate, didn't accurately understand parecon's remuneration method. He understood that it says that workers should get income for their effort and sacrifice, the ethics of which he ignored, but he missed that the labor has to be socially useful.

The parecon norm is that you get more income for more duration, more intensity, or more onerousness of your work, or you get less income for the opposite, but that this holds only if the work you do, for the duration you do it, is socially useful. If it isn't socially useful, which means if it isn't sufficiently effective, then the work isn't remunerated. This means I can't furiously dig holes in my backyard and furiously fill them, and get good pay for doing so. It produces nothing of value. It also means that I can't be remunerated as an artist, baseball player, surgeon, airplane pilot, translator, or countless other things that I simply couldn't do well enough for my labors to be
deemed socially useful. The hours expended don't generate sufficient value to be deemed well spent, or socially useful. I can't work long and hard doing something that has no value, or doing something that has insufficient value per hour due to my ineffectiveness when I am doing it, and expect to be paid fully for it. There is a subtlety here that Schweickart missed, though the point is made often in the book. Without this confusion, I think we will see that Schweickart's concerns about feasibility disappear.

To understand the subtle point, suppose I work at some firm in a parecon. My firm has to provide outputs to society commensurate to its labor and technical assets, inputs, and time spent, if all its effort is to be judged socially useful. If my firm doesn't do that, the overall remuneration for my firm's employees goes down because not all its labor was socially useful. Suppose my firm's employees all together worked a whole lot, a total of a hundred thousand hours in a month, but that it didn't generate outputs commensurate to that work level and the inputs we used, our technological capacity, etc., all functioning at average intensity. Total remuneration available for our workforce would be reduced in accord - because some of the labor we did was socially useless or was carried out at low intensity relative to average. Note, we don't ever have a pool of income to share matching the value of our output, but we do have a pool of income to share that rises or falls relative to average-per-worker-hour depending on our effectiveness at generating output compared to the average for our industry.

Schweickart's concerns about parecon's remuneration are that the method of determining how much income each worker should get will lead to the workplace not performing up to capacity. But, he fails to realize that workers do indeed pay a price when their firm under produces. Total income goes down and some members of the firm must as a result earn less, or if all are to earn the same, then all on average must earn less.

So here is the actual situation in parecon, at least as I perceive it so far in the model's development. Each workforce gets its income from a pool of payment that its firm's output warrants. For a given workplace, if some workers have worked harder, they should get more than those who preferred to work less hard, or who just did so. The same goes for working longer or less long and likewise if there is a differential in quality of work time. So if our firm engages in job rating inflation, with assessors giving everyone high ratings, it accomplishes nothing. They don't all get more by saying that they all worked more if they in fact didn't more. The pool of payment doesn't go up by workers mislabeling their effort. If the workers don't accurately evidence the relative differences among themselves in work time, intensity, or onerousness, they don't get more or get less than one another, but they all get the same. The sum total of their allotment isn't under control of their assessments, just its relative apportionment. The sum total allotment depends on how long they in fact work, how hard, and how onerous the conditions in their industry are, but also on how effectively they work in that their work must be socially useful.

It is true that I believe different workplaces will adopt different approaches to attending to differentials in effort and sacrifice. Some workplaces will likely feel that there isn't that much difference likely to exist, over a year, with balanced job complexes, and it isn't worth the time and hassle of trying to discern tiny variations from month to month, given that they will largely average out anyhow. These workplaces will have only a few categories - perhaps average, above average, and below average - and not much fine specificity. Other workplaces might have more highly refined categories, and therefore greater numbers of categories, getting into percentage differences. Even in the workplaces where workers prefer to attend closely to effort differences, suppose someone works less but has a good personal excuse for it. Nothing prevents the workers council from awarding full income, like to others, if it wishes. It means everyone helps out with a little bit of their rightful income, because someone had family problems, or whatever. A parecon could also have means for the workplace to make a case for increasing its allotment, due to
legitimate explanations of low output. Different parecons, like different firms inside a parecon, might have different policies in countless features. What is similar among parecons is the defining inclusion of workers’ and consumers self managing councils, remuneration for effort and sacrifice, balanced job complexes, and participatory planning, not the detailed optional features of each, much less of other aspects.

Schweickart hears parecon saying "first of all, you are evaluated on the basis of effort, not output, and secondly, you are evaluated by your peers, not by a boss." The latter part of this is true. The former part has the subtlety that Schweickart missed, however. You are remunerated for effort, yes, but output per asset determines the total income that is available for dispersal among the whole workforce, not only in the economy, but for each workplace as well.

Schweickart notes that for workers to monitor effort by whatever means they might choose is fine if "a) they are motivated to do so, and b) the evaluation criteria can be readily applied." He thinks neither is the case in a parecon. He says if he had as part of his responsibility assessing effort ratings, he would not be conscientious in doing so. "If I give my peers good ratings, they will be happy. If I give them bad ratings, they will be unhappy. There is nothing to gained for myself or my co-workers by my being conscientious." But this is false. And it isn't just that I think Schweickart is wrong in his self assessment because I think his morality would prevent his lying, though that shouldn't be ignored in an equitable environment like a parecon workplace where class interests are a thing of the past. Additionally, I think Schweickart would himself not be doing socially valued labor if he dogged his task by giving everyone identical inflated ratings, rather than trying to make accurate assessments at whatever degree of refinement his workplace decided they wanted. But more, if he, or really the relevant committee or work team or whatever, oversees the council, gives high ratings to some workers, then those workers will get more of the total income available for members of the firm, and other workers in the firm will get less. He would get less, too. If he gives high ratings to everyone, however, it has no impact, unless it is true. If it is false, the output of the plant will be commensurate only to an average level of effort per worker, or perhaps even to a low effort rating for everyone. And that's what will determine the pot of income that will be dispersed. That everyone has the same rating, high or not, means everyone will get an equal share of that reduced amount. Messing with ratings does not increase the total income for all workers in the firm, nor even diminish it, and it disrupts a true dispersal in accord with actual effort to the disadvantage of those putting forth more effort and to the advantage of those putting forth less. I don't know how Schweickart missed all this, but it does render his concerns that people will have no reason to be conscientious moot.

Schweickart's next concern is, if he were among those a part of whose job was assessing effort ratings, "even if I wanted to be conscientious, could I be?" He says, "in Parecon one is evaluated according to effort, not output." But again, this is false. In parecon you are remunerated for effort, not for output, correct. But you most certainly can be, if it is revealing, evaluated for output. If my output is low or faulty, I am either not exerting or I am doing so poorly - which may well mean that part of my exertion is not socially useful. I don't know how Schweickart missed this element of the model either, since it is enunciated repeatedly in the book, as here.

Schweickart says, "if you make a lot of mistakes in your clerical task, how can our committee determine whether you are working hard, but are just not good at the task, or are simply not paying attention?" Actually, it turns out that in his terms, regarding income in the moment, it doesn't matter. Either way, if the workplace has chosen to distinguish among workers based on tight assessments, your income will be lower, because whether it is from being inattentive or it is from being sloppy or incompetent, not all your work is socially useful and if the workplace wants to account each person's relative income closely, that will come into play. The solution, if you are to get your income back up, will be for you to do other tasks that you can do sufficiently well to be
socially useful per hour, or to work more effectively at those you are doing. Actually, I doubt any workplace would dock pay for this kind of failing, supposing it was honest and not shirking, but rather just reassign jobs. But that's up to the workers council. Schweickart says, "and what if a low rated worker disagrees with his evaluation? What do we do?", and he seems to think this is a very telling point but I don't understand why. The workplace has norms and rules. One is about remuneration. You get what you earn. You don't like the assessment, okay, you might complain and moan, and maybe you will convince a grievance board, or whatever, but if not, you can suck it up or you might even quit and get a job elsewhere, but if you work in some firm, and the firm has collectively adopted tight procedures and graded you low, then lower pay is what you get.

Schweickart notes rightly that I claim that "Whereas differences in contribution to output will derive from differences in talent, training, job assignment, tools, luck and effort, . . . only effort merits compensation" where effort has been defined as duration, intensity, and onerousness of socially valued labor. He goes on to say that I seem "not to realize that separating effort from output renders the evaluation committee's task impossible." He is however himself not realizing that separating remuneration from output, which parecon does, in no way implies separating effort from output, which parecon does not do. Of course, effort generates output, and less output often reveals less effort or socially inadequate effort.

I have to say, Schweickart would be right, if a bit uncivil, to say that I had been ignorant or unrealistic or even, I suppose, irrational, if I had ignored all this. But I didn't ignore it. So now one wonders, why didn't Schweickart see that I didn't, or if he did see it, why didn't he refer to it? Maybe it wasn't written well, I don't know, but if he didn't see this kind of argument, why didn't the growing support for parecon, and his claimed respect for me, for that matter, cause him to look a little harder, instead of rushing to wrong judgment? Maybe he was too intent on finding flaw?

Schweickart deduces that "It should be clear that evaluators will tend to give everyone the same evaluation--above average, if possible, average if there are higher-order constraints against Parecon-Wobegon. Monitors have no good way of measuring effort, and little reason to be strict." In fact, however, monitors can measure effort by assessing output, as Schweickart would have them do, as well as by simply seeing what their co-workers are up to, etc., with far more proximity than anyone has in a corporate or market environment. Does Schweickart really think workers familiar with conditions and jobs would have a hard time knowing whether he was shirking or intensely exerting, being able to look at collective output, and being part of creating it - unlike typical current managers or owners? Moreover, monitors have good reason to be conscientious - though not so nit picky as to waste time, nor so punitive as to overly punish well-meant but poor work. Their own income depends on conscientious labor by them, and so does everyone else's depend on their recommendations. People can't benefit in sum total from inflated ratings, and distorted ratings punish those who in fact put forth relatively more effort while they reward those who didn't, an option that workers would certainly not favor, or consider a job well done by evaluators, and worth remunerating.

Schweickart says "if everyone gets the same evaluation, we are confronted with a motivational problem of the first order." But not everyone gets the same evaluation. Schweickart doesn't understand, to make the point again and make sure it is perfectly clear, that the income to be dispersed to a parecon firm's workforce depends on the firm's overall productivity. If it is average for the assets the firm has, there is a total income to disperse internally that is the social average per worker per hour. If the firm's output is above average, then there is some more per worker per hour, or if it is below average, there is some less. If I slack off relative to others, then the total pot available to the firm drops. If I get graded as average even though I was slacking off, I am getting somewhat over paid, and everyone else is losing a little as a result. If we all say we worked at the same level of effort, and we all slack off, we all get the same amount, but below the social average.
We get less, in accord with the reduction in plant output relative to its assets. Similarly, if some slack off, some work extra hard, and some work average, if they are graded that way they get an accurate share of the firm's total pot, if they are graded too high or too low, then the shares diverge from accuracy, but the pot is unchanged. Is any of this perfectly accurate, matching exactly what some omniscient being would tell us was the precisely correct effort ratings for every worker, like some kind of perfect engineering joint, down to the fifth decimal point? Of course not, not nearly. It is a social process. But it is a self managed one, socially agreed to, collectively undertaken, and with economically appropriate incentives and ethically sound income attributes.

Schweickart rightly notes that each individual worker has an incentive to work less hard or less longâ€¦ so as to endure "less stress, more time to be sociable with one's workmates," etc. He thinks that slacking off will have no income effect on the worker, or on fellow workers, however, so everyone will automatically do it. But once again, this is simply incorrect. If worker/consumers want to work less, that's fine, it is a plausible social choice. I think a parecon's workforce will indeed have that inclination relative to a market economy because markets force long duration high intensity work beyond the outputs anyone actually wants, which a parecon doesn't. So the work week might well drop, say to thirty hours, rather than climbing, as in markets, to whatever humans can bear regardless of their preferences. But while one is working in a parecon, for whatever duration the work week is, to work sloppily, lazily, or otherwise unproductively, will reduce output and reduce total income for the plant, which will either come from the pay of the slack worker, or from the pay of all workers if inaccurate ratings hide the differential. In fact, far more so than market economies, parecon provides workers an appropriate incentive for enduring stress, time away from leisure and sociability, and so on, rather than forcing excessive work on everyone by punishing anything less than that with market failure and unemployment. Thus, contrary to Schweickart's fear, parecon provides sensible incentives for work and avoids providing gigantic bonuses to those with power, and harsh penalties to those lacking power.

Schweickart says hard work requires incentive, and I agree. He says moral incentives have their place (discussed carefully in the book) but material ones matter too. And I agree. That's why parecon remunerates for duration, intensity, and onerousness of socially useful work - precisely to provide motivation for the labor that Schweickart rightly thinks, without suitable motivation, we would all rather not do. And it is also why parecon doesn't reward property, power, genetic endowment, luck, and other variables which are not only not morally deserving of reward, but which in being rewarded do not, in fact, provide useful incentive for hard and onerous labor. Perhaps Schweickart's effort to explain why growing numbers of people are becoming interested in and even advocates of parecon, but not of market socialist models, missed an obvious possibility. Markets destroy what people who are not defending elite class interests value. Parecon, when you look a bit deeper than Schweickart did, enhances and enlarges what people not defending elite interests value.

**Parecon's Allocation:**
**Efficient Self Management Or Logistical Frenzy?**

Schweickart's final feasibility concern is with participatory planning. He wonders, "How would you do it? How would Parecon determine what should be produced? How would it bring people's needs and wants into alignment with what the workforce is willing and able to produce?"

I think these are good questions to ask. But next, instead of taking the model seriously, and pursuing his own questions seriously, Schweickart follows a path like that which he followed for the other two aspects addressed above. He misrepresents or misinterprets, as the case may be, just
enough to be able to then ridicule, while appealing, I think, to what he believes are people's prior prejudices that anything truly participatory would be too unwieldy or too unreal to implement. Let's see whether this characterization is fair.

Again, there is a difference between getting going - which is difficult - and operating a parecon that is well established. This time, though, Schweickart takes issue with the latter, not the former. He notes that parecon requires that during the planning period consumers - and he should have noted consumer groups as in neighborhoods, communities, etc. - have to assess their projected incomes (based in turn on how much they will work) and propose commensurate consumption. The consumer, he notes, would have to take last year's list of consumption and adapt it with changes both for different taste and for different income, and then submit that. (Schweickart mistakes the possibility of a neighborhood questioning a submission for Sherman tanks, or for gigantic lawn lights, or for enough liquor to open a store, for a gross personal intrusion because he fails to note that the process is anonymous, again missing what is repeatedly noted in the book.) People also provide, during planning, textual explanations for large changes in their consumption as a hedge against price indicators alone misleading either producers or consumers (another point dealt with in the book, but ignored by Schweickart who implies that it is just a needless, senseless burden, which, of course, if it was, or if it turns out to be, it could just be eliminated, the point being, parecon is a system under development, not a finished blueprint, and will be refined and adapted until it is implemented, and probably long thereafter too.)

Schweickart’s ridicule is that no one could possibly be a responsible consumer in participatory planning. "For some reason Parecon supporters don't have a problem with having to make a list of all the things one might want to consume during the course of a year." That's probably because they understand and relate to the extensive discussions providing descriptions of how this might be done, indicating, for example, that it is not all items but all classes of items that must be addressed, and also because they realize consumers would already have their last year's consumption and wouldn't start from scratch, and because they know consumers' choices can of course be refined and altered over time, and so on and so forth, all omitted by Schweickart.

Schweickart says, "Well, let's see. Let's start with a week. Roughly, what would I like to consume next week?" But in fact, this is not the way the process would work. It is him imposing a silly process and then calling it silly, just like he did regarding balancing job complexes. You don't need to figure each week's consumption and add it all up. And again the system doesn't expect or need absolute precision of any kind, much less individual by individual. Schweickart suggests that he drinks three cups of coffee a day—well, if so, last year, he would have drunk a bit over a thousand cups. Does he expect a change, probably not, but maybe so. It takes a few seconds thought, most likely to massage this number. This will be true of most items all down the list, becoming false for items where he has some new inclination or expects to replace things that usually he wouldn't buy - a new refrigerator for a broken one, and so on.

Schweickart says "I sometimes eat cereal for breakfast. That'll require some sugar and some milk. How much sugar? How much milk? Let me think about that." Yes, he makes it sound idiotic, but instead of this, in fact he will simply see that he did x cereal, y sugar, and z milk last year, and given his budget, and health, he will decide if he is going to change that significantly, or pretty much do the same.

Schweickart continues, "Sometimes I scramble an egg. That'll require some salt, pepper, butter. Sometimes I have some bacon—Hmm--I'm only in the first half-hour of the day", and this is just scare mongering, assuming one takes it seriously, though actually, if you think about it, even this ridiculous approach, was moving right along. But imagine we did things his way for shopping in markets, say once a week, or two or three times, for some people - you'd have to calculate like this
over and over week after week. Add it up for the full year and it would be far more time consumed than doing even this silliness for participatory planning - and with planning, it is critical to keep in mind that you actually are proportionately impacting what is available, proportionately determining general and your own income distribution, setting your work time, and, in short, cooperatively collectively self managing, in a classless context, individual and collective social consumption, rather than merely competing to disadvantage others and to help only yourself in a context sharply limiting your possibilities of succeeding even at that.

Schweickart acknowledges that working from last year's consumption makes things easier, but then notes: "I look at last year's list. I see that I consumed two hundred and twelve eggs last year, eleven pounds of bacon, two pounds of saltâ€¦ Wow! This is a pretty long list! It goes on for pages and pages. It's hard to believe I consumed all that stuff in just one year."

Yes, and it would be interesting to know what we consume, wouldn't it? Of course the planning aspect would not have to be nearly so detailed, for those who didn't want to get that involved, instead focusing more on a set of categories than on all items. Interestingly, Schweickart never presents even a single reason why parecon has participatory planning. He is only concerned to make a case that it would be time consuming, as if having to take some time to control one's life was (a) odious and (b) the only thing anyone might wish to avoid. I actually think parecon would save so much time at diverse points - shopping, escaping ads, not dealing with taxes, not having to work seventy, sixty, fifty, or even forty hours, but only thirty, not advancing profit or surplus for only a few, not having to defend class interests, or ward off oppressive assaults - that even if I was wrong and Schweickart was right and participatory planning took a whole lot more time than I anticipate, nonetheless, on balance, there would be substantial time gains. Of course, if not, Schweickart is right that I would still be for it. Not out of obsession, but because while time matters to me, so does classlessness and even in Schweickart's tilted renditions, time lost wouldn't come close to offset the gains from solidarity, equity, diversity, and self management, not to mention proper pricing, etc. etc.

Schweickart says, "What would I like to consume this coming year? I've been thinking about giving up meat, so that gives me some options. I can compare what I spent on bacon with what I might spend on . . . what? Maybe soybeans." Actually, it is not such a dumb task, but Schweickart ignores that it is rather easy to do all this at different levels of category, if one so chooses. One can operate at the level of chicken, duck, etc., or at the level of poultry. One can operate at the level of chicken, pork, beef, etc. or at the level of meat, and likewise for all other categories. Statistically, producers can easily move from demand for whole categories to demand for components within a category, and for planning purposes each person can be priced at average rates for the overall category. Is this viable? Only trying would tell for sure, but I think it would be. Updating preferences occurs during the whole year, as well. I can't present here everything Schweickart leaves out that both makes participatory planning itself more streamlined and less time consuming, but that also explains all the offsetting gains, not only in time spent, but in equity, solidarity, diversity, self management, and classlessness. But I have put it in the book, at least as well as I could perceive it in the evolving model.

Schweickart says, "We have a problem here. If I don't specify what gifts I want, including such details as size, style and color, how are the producers going to know what to produce?" The answer, of course, is that they are sensible at what they do and therefore have a host of ways of knowing the proportions of people in various sizes, and favoring various colors, from among a total that wants sweaters, or socks, or what have you. And they can adapt their choices as the year progresses and so too can producers adapt their products.
My problem with Schweickart's review is that while it is fine to raise the points he does, it is not fine, I think, to act as though the book itself didn't both raise them and address them, as well as far more substantive matters, nor is it fine to ignore the actual reasons offered for participatory planning, as compared to having markets, say - which merely misprice all goods, often by as much as an order of magnitude, impose a rat race process and mentality, require virtually unlimited growth and thus imposes long hours despite counter desires, and impose class division. In contrast, even if Schweickart were right, participatory planning - that is, cooperatively negotiating the whole economy's direction and content - would actually take some time and involve some thought, while eliminating all the other mentioned debits. Well, that's true enough—but put that way, perhaps it is less off putting.

Schweickart says, "How will the producers know what kind of skirt [buyers] want or the kind of sweater I'd like to give my wife if we don't specify these details on our consumption-preference list?" The answer is, of course, that in a parecon they don't explicitly know, rather they do their best to provide quality items that people will like. If people don't like some, they don't provide more of that. And so on. Markets are somewhat like that, though in markets there is the constraint that profits have to be maximized and the workforce has to be kept subordinate. If parecon producers offer up skirts or sweaters people don't like, despite their testing them with control groups, and so on, people won't purchase them at distribution centers, and styles will be changed. But the bigger issue is precisely as I offered in the brief comment that Schweickart derisively quoted; "Applying all this to skirts, we should want the tastes and preferences of all workers and consumers and particularly of people who wear them and of those who produce skirts to interactively proportionately influence the length and color, as well as their number and composition, their method of production, and so on--instead of profit seeking determining the result."

For Schweickart, this difference - between competitive profit seeking (or surplus expanding) on the one hand, and self managing consumers and producers' desires, on the other hand - determining styles not to mention determining methods of production, work place conditions, relative values, income distribution, workday length, and collective goods provision, etc. - is inconsequential, and even silly, next to the serious issue which for him seems to be only that participatory planning would demand some part of one's time in a different way than we are currently used to a few weeks a year. Despite valuing time so much, Schweickart nonetheless ignores time-gains during all other times of the year. Well, different strokes for different folks, I guess. And I think that, indeed, that's what our differences stem from, different values. But, in any event, for Schweickart to suggest that it is simply impossible for people to propose consumption and for workers to propose production, and for a cooperative negotiation to arrive at proximate equality between those proposals by their steady refinement is simply scare mongering, rather than as he would put it, highlighting an obvious reality that only a self deluded person could be blind to. We are, indeed, far apart.

Schweickart says "Maybe I'm just being picky," but actually, I don't see it that way. His broad concerns are real and valid. The problem is, they are dealt with, at length, in the book. So why did the logic and argument of the book not register? Was it a fault of the writing, or the reading?

Schweickart says, "Maybe most people will just look at last year's list and make only a few changes. (Of course there are 100 million households in the U.S., so even 'a few' will be millions, but never mind. Let's move on.)" What is this kind of formulation supposed to convey? That he is generously skipping over a major problem? In fact, of course, changes mostly average out. This is the kind of calculation, without nearly as useful data, and with highly skewed motivations, firms employ now. Let's assume every living unit in a parecon U.S. had some kind of ecologically sensible vehicle, say 150 million of them in all. Each year let's say six percent need to be replaced. So 9 million people who last year bought one, this year won't, and will have extra income for other things. Maybe a
piano, or whatever. Another 9 million will now get one, which they didn't last year, having less income for other things. So what is Schweickart's point about it being millions? Of course it is millions. Now let's suppose there is something important, a new technology available for transport, and instead of 9 million, 30 million want a new vehicle. Well this will certainly have large repercussions, indeed. Markets routinely screw up this kind of thing; not to mention having the prices horribly wrong in any event, mistreating the producers, not having the vehicles ecologically sound, and so on. Participatory planning would encounter no particular difficulties dealing with it.

Schweickart says, "I've been quoting from Albert to assure the reader that I am not making this up." Well actually, he did very selective quoting, as anyone must, but, okay, the reader can decide whether I and others advocating parecon are irrationally out of touch with reality, on Schweickart's word that this is so, or can investigate for themselves. I hope they will do the latter. The issues seem more than important enough. Class division and class rule - or not.

**The Parecon Phenomenon 2: Wise Option or Delusional Silliness?**

When someone says "I am not caricaturing his position," as Schweickart tells us, does it ring any bells for you. It would for me, even if I was unfamiliar with this vision. He says "I have been trying to imagine what Albert's proposals would require, concretely, if we tried to implement them" but fails to say that in my writing I do the same thing, describing actual planning sessions, the actual work situations and processes one might expect, and so on, but making perfectly clear that it is just to get a feeling for possibilities, to see the possible texture, and so on. Such features will emerge fully, and in diverse patterns, only in practice.

At this point, Schweickart says, "It is inconceivable to me that such a system would work. It is hard for me to imagine any rational being thinking otherwise."

Well, he now has a conundrum. If his image of parecon is accurate, he deduces that I must be irrational, and likewise the people who he notes, and who he admires, who have urged attention to parecon, and the people creating parecon institutions, and the people translating it into numerous languages, and so on, must also be irrational. That's why Schweickart wrings his hands trying to explain what is to him the inexplicable "parecon phenomenon." Why in hell's bells are there parecon web pages in multiple languages, overseen by interested parties in numerous countries? Why are there pareconish institutions popping up, people doing their university theses on it, and so on? Madness. Interestingly, it doesn't occur to Schweickart to even entertain the possibility that just perhaps we are rational, and he has missed some key insights and relations.

Schweickart says, getting explicit I guess for consistency's sake, "it's an impolite question, but it has to be asked. Why have Chomsky, et al. endorsed such nonsense?" Clearly, he deduces, I must have tricked or pleaded Chomsky into it, and likewise for even those advocates that I don't know, that I have never communicated with, etc. That's also why people are creating new institutions using balanced job complexes, I guess. Silly people. Schweickart's second explicit question is why have I not renounced this idiotic system. He decides it is because I am so driven by hope that classlessness is possible that I have lost touch with reason. Okay, that could be true. Such things do happen. Readers and others will have to decide.
Final Evaluation:
Shareable Vision or Disposable Nonsense?

At any rate, having in his view buried parecon as utterly beyond the pale in its divorce from reality, Schweickart finally says something about its merits if it were viable. He asks, quite reasonably, "Why would anyone want to live in such a system?"

He asserts, not so reasonably, "It is a system obsessed with comparison (Is your job complex more empowering than mine?), with monitoring (You are not working at average intensity, mate--get with the program), with the details of consumption (How many rolls of toilet paper will I need next year? Why are some of my neighbors still using the kind not made of recycled paper?)."

I fail to see, I admit, when I ignore Schweickart's derisive tone and add just a little context, all of which Schweickart presumably read about in detail but discounted as not even worth noting, what the problem is with the above concerns - not obsessions, of course.

In the broad scale, for example, it is indeed important, even paramount, whether job complexes are balanced, and this is not just for personal fairness, which is important enough, but to avoid class division and class rule. If that claim is true, than Schweickart's rendition is silly, isn't it? So why didn't he take up the claim, I wonder.

As to Schweickart's concern about monitoring, how important parecon workers find differentials in effort and how much time and energy they want to give to discerning them will be up to them. I bet all workers will feel that whatever choice is made in their workplace, it is a gigantic improvement over a competitive market imposing vast income differentials based on variables other than effort, not to mention imposing class differentiation in decision making in the firm. Where is the obsession part?

Likewise, regarding consumption, I claim that being concerned, not obsessed, about consumption's social, ecological, and personal implications, as well as about its implications for producers, particularly during a planning period but in general thereafter too, will, in a civilized society, be considered natural and part of life - somewhat onerous but also somewhat engaging and interesting - and in any case a vast improvement on being excluded from significantly influencing all large scale consumption/production decisions, and from having accurate and full information or valuations, not to mention suffering all kinds of pollution, shoddy production, advertising, and so on, as a by-product.

But while I don't see even a single problem to work on in Schweickart's list of damning ills, I do see a problem with Schweickart leaving out gains that might help explain what attracts people like myself, other advocates, noted commentators, and so on, to parecon - minor virtues like attaining equitable income distribution, accurate valuations of products, self management, classlessness, ecological attentiveness, solidarity based on shared self interests, and so on.

Schweickart is disdainful that my book Parecon: Life After Capitalism didn't discuss strategy for attaining a parecon. Well, before talking about attaining a system, one needs to have agreement that it is worth attaining. I was working on that prior problem, in the book that he read. In other writings I have addressed at length more strategic matters, of concern to folks who already advocate attaining parecon.

Schweickart says, "Where does this leave us? Must we give up on the dream of a humane future beyond capitalism? I think not--but we must think hard about the viability of the alternatives we propose. We must also pay attention to the ethical foundations of our proposals." I find this pretty
incredible, I have to say. It's not that I disagree, on the contrary, I very much agree. That's the problem. Schweickart read Parecon and, despite being a philosopher and according to the above considering ethical foundations centrally important, said not a single word about the book's very explicit presentation of ethical foundations. I wonder why.

Schweickart says, "in particular, we should reject the obsessive egalitarianism that underlies the Parecon proposal. This strict egalitarianism is morally problematic." There's that word again, obsession, obsessive, whatever. Well maybe. But before rushing to the conclusion that only a fool would advocate pareconish egalitarianism, you might wonder what you would be rejecting if you followed Schweickart's advice? Mainly, first, you would be rejecting the idea that we shouldn't have a class that monopolizes empowering labor and rules the economy above a class that carries out orders and does rote and tedious labor. You would be rejecting the idea that we should equalize access to empowering conditions. And likewise, second, you would be rejecting the idea that everyone should have a share of the total social product proportionate to the duration, intensity, and onerousness of the socially valued labor they contributed to its production. That's way too egalitarian, too, it seems.

Schweickart says, "[parecon would] undercut the generosity of spirit a socialist ethic should promote." When I read that sentence, I admit I was at a loss to understand. How could having equitable incomes and classless allocation of empowering conditions, instead of having gross income differentials and class division, undermine generosity, I wondered? Schweickart explained. "Suppose, for example, that I am happy with my work and with my level of consumption. Then I learn that you got more than I did without working any harder. May I take vicarious pleasure in your good fortune? May I fantasize that I too might one day get lucky?" Is this really the substance of Schweickart's concern about equitable distribution and empowerment? He goes on, "if your greater income is a reward for your greater contribution, may I feel good that you are so honored?"

Well, let's see. Does Schweickart feel good that NBA players earn fifty or even a hundred times what he does? Would he feel good working in a plant where managers existed and earned ten or twenty times what he did, instead of in a plant where he and everyone had similarly empowering labor, and earned differently only due to their actual efforts? What would he say to the custodian who cleans his office at night while he is at home who doesn't take vicarious joy out of Schweickart earning two or three times as much, but instead says he isn't so pleased at Schweickart earning more for doing a far more cushy job and that he is tired as hell of having no say over his life and sick of economic institutions that enforce a class above him ruling over him?

Schweickart says "May I consider honing my own talents so that I too might be rewarded more?" How about honing his talents, instead, so he can enjoy the status and pleasure of achievement, as well as fulfilling his capacities? And what does he think when people opt to hone their bargaining power, which is what is actually relevant in a market system? Is that good? Talents, by the way, are generally overwhelmingly inborn, which is why no matter how long Schweickart honed his talents, he would not be able to earn like Kobe Bryant or Bode Miller. What Schweickart really means, is may I consider increasing my skills and knowledge through training, and in a parecon, of course, if that contributes to socially valued productivity (which is what Schweickart is asking about) it is remunerated like all valued effort. Likewise, power has to do with many variables, which is why no matter what he hones, Schweickart is not going to earn like a CEO of a corporation, or its lawyers, in a market system.

Schweickart is talking about incomes, above, as if the issue is quite modest differentials that are forbidden. But quite modest differentials, perhaps up to two-to-one in some cases, are precisely
what arise from differences in duration, intensity, and onerousness, and certainly not forbidden in a parecon. Differences in property, power, or even contribution to output (which includes being lucky enough to have better tools, or to happen to be producing something more valued, or to be lucky enough to be born Barbara Streisand or otherwise productively genetically endowed, not to mention due to being greedy and callous enough to accrue sufficient bargaining power to compel huge payments) that markets reward all yield not modest income differences but huge income differences that in turn lead to concentrations of power and wealth and obliterate self management and solidarity while generating a class divided competitive result.

Schweickart says, in a parecon "If you got more than me without working any harder, I am a victim of injustice. Righteous indignation is the appropriate response, not pleasure or inspiration. I experience your success as my humiliation. This is not an ethic of solidarity." Well, maybe that's how things would appear for Schweickart, I don't know. But actually, in a parecon one person's great success - say inventing something, performing incredibly well, being brilliant at some task, having great productivity in some pursuit, or whatever, will have exactly the implications Schweickart describes. We will celebrate it, be inspired by it, enjoy it, take vicarious pleasure in it, etc. There will be no need to be materially jealous of it, however, because income isn't involved in the corporate market sense. In fact, we all benefit together. Increases in output increase the average social income. Increases in tools to do work without suffering harsh conditions, improve the average balanced job complex of society. Increases in knowledge, art, etc. are equally accessible to all. And so on. My income goes up only if I work harder, longer, etc. - and why would anyone begrudge that - or if great achievements that we can all revel in push up the social average for everyone. What Schweickart says is that if in a parecon things happened which in fact don't happen there, such as people being remunerated for inborn talent, people would find it unjust. It's an odd formulation, but it's true. In contrast, people who aren't on top find what actually happens in a market system to be unjust. And it isn't just that parecon eliminates the most damning economic obstacles to solidarity - giant in come differences, class domination, etc. - it creates a context in which we each have to be concerned with everyone else's well being to most effectively advance our own. Social averages affect everyone. Regarding interpersonal relations and solidarity, parecon accomplishes what Schweickart seems to be asking for.

Schweickart is saying, just to hammer this home, if we have a system that achieves equity - having defined equity as income according to effort and sacrifice - people will see violations of that type of equity as unjust. That's correct. He also implies that people will become obsessed lunatics, seeing any deviation that arise, however small and due to ignorance of exact measure, as reason for heartbreak or anger. That's absurd. He ignores that in a parecon remuneration is not only morally just but provides appropriate economic incentives. Cause for feeling relations are unjust exist, however, intrinsically and always in what a market system constantly and persistently imposes on us, unless one is deluded, or self delusional, about what the word "unjust" means.

Schweickart moves from implying that there is something contrary to solidarity about workers in a plant being concerned if one of them against the logic of the system is being lazy all day but is taking pay that they rightfully earned (though he doesn't seem to think that having managers govern your day from above, and earn more pay for working shorter hours, less hard, and in less onerous conditions, all in accord with system dictates, will generate any feelings contrary to solidarity), to saying, as a way to ridicule parecon yet again, "strict egalitarianism is the ethic of squabbling siblings. (Gary got a bigger piece of pie than me. That's not fair! Gary gets to stay up later than me. That's not fair! Dad likes Gary better than me. That's not fair!) It is not an ethical principle that should command our allegiance."

I don't know quite what to say. The book Parecon includes an extended discussion of the underlying morals of the system, including, bearing on Schweickart's concern, remuneration for
The Ideological Difference: To Market, or Not?

And now comes the real heart of it. Schweickart says, "If we want to construct an economically viable, ethically desirable, alternative to capitalism, we should distance ourselves not only from Albert's obsessive egalitarianism, but also from his implacable hostility to markets." Now I am not only obsessive, but implacable. That aside, Schweickart is, in fact, an advocate of market socialism, as he would proudly verify, a system which I reject for a host of reasons, some of which he quotes: "Markets aren't a little bad, or even just very bad in some contexts. Instead, in all contexts, markets instill anti-social motivations in buyers and sellers, misprice items that are exchanged, misdirect aims regarding what to produce in what quantities and by what means, mis-remunerate producers, introduce class divisions and class rule, and embody an imperial logic that spreads itself throughout economic life."

Indeed, I think all the above, which Schweickart quoted, though I could extend the list greatly, and I argue very closely why these ills arise from markets, among other problems. Schweickart's response is "Markets indeed have defects, but they have virtues as well." They do all the above nasty things - he doesn't deny any of my claims - but, oh yes, they also do accomplish some useful things sufficiently for the economy to run. Well, I agree with that. I don't think, however, that it is enough to offset all the above deficits, especially since participatory planning can accomplish allocation not just sufficiently for an economy to run, but in accord with producers' and consumers' preferences, in accord with assessments of true social costs and benefits, and without all the ills noted for markets, instead fostering solidarity, elevating diversity, furthering equity, and embodying self management.

Schweickart says, "we need to think dialectically about markets." I think he means we need to pay attention to both virtues and debits of markets, and again I agree. That's why I am a market abolitionist. In fact, sometimes looking around at what markets have wrought, and thinking through the properties of a system built on the precept that we should buy cheap and sell dear so as to fleece our exchange partner because nice guys finish last, I admit that I wonder how any rational person could possibly advocate markets, but I of course know many who do.

Schweickart says, "markets are democratic (in that they respond to consumer preferences), and they are undemocratic, (since they tend to exacerbate income inequality)." This badly understates the situation. I can't provide full details here - this essay is way too long already - but insofar as I am correct that markets inexorably induce a class division in which about 20% of the population overwhelmingly determine economic outcomes and the other 80% overwhelmingly obeys instructions, functions in contexts set by others, operates according to other's agendas, etc., and insofar as markets compel, against everyone's will, surplus maximization and unending accumulation, and insofar as they obscure true social costs and values which is information essential to informed decision making in general and specially regarding the ecology, markets make a travesty even of democracy, much less of self management. This is not to mention that via accumulation they yield huge centers of coercive power - corporations.

Schweickart says, "Markets enhance the space of individual freedom, (since consumer choices are not subject to the approval of others), and they contract the space of individual freedom, (since
market choices often have third-party effects)." Again, to me this is strangely formulated. First off, in markets of course purchases are subject to approval, there are all kinds of laws preventing violations of noise norms, health norms, and so on and so forth, and notice, this is not a bad thing. But, more relevant, saying that my suffering disease or my having to pay to treat others suffering it, because markets ignore the social impact of transactions (third party effects) and therefore generate incredible pollution, is not a sidebar concern - but is enough reason, even just in itself, to abhor markets and seek an alternative.

Schweickart says, "Markets provide incentives for constructive behavior (efficient use of resources, innovation) and for destructive behavior (consumer manipulation, disregard of ecological consequences)." Actually, since markets require that we use resources and undertake innovation only and solely to enlarge surplus - not to meet needs except as a means to the other end - everything about them is alienated including their derivative "efficiency" and "innovation." In a market system, save insofar as some doctors and nurses rebel, we get health care because it is profitable - indeed, only if it is profitable - not because the system, or its members, are concerned about us. Pursuit of profit, or surplus, determines outcomes. Of course, beyond hospitals, this means pharmaceutical companies jack up prices at the expense of piling up corpses, vast stores of innovation goes into creating manipulative packaging and advertising, and so on. More, on what Schweickart admits is the for him lesser downside, markets don't just provide a little inclination to manipulate via ads or dump poisons on neighborhoods, they make such behavior absolutely essential in order to compete with other firms. They make it ubiquitous, not minor. Firms innovate a product for the same reason they dump toxic waste, to make surpluses with which to stay in business, and the latter is often far more rational for the firm than the former. Indeed, it is true that markets propel innovation and production, so much so that we have to work far longer hours and far more intensely than our needs for produced goods warrant.

Schweickart says, "Neither market fundamentalism nor market rejectionism is an appropriate response to the reality of economic complexity." Why is this so? Is it because the middle ground is always more sensible? Well, that's just not the case. We don't say about dictatorship, which can accomplish political functions sufficiently for states to run, that dictatorship has, in context, some benefits and some debits, and so we shouldn't be dictatorship rejectionists. The reality of economic complexity, or of political complexity, does not rule out having values that preclude employing certain institutions which run rampant over those values. Call me implacable if you wish, but I remain a market abolitionist, even though I know markets are going to be around for some time to come.

Schweickart says, "God knows, we do not want to live in a world dominated by rapacious, unaccountable economic institutions that pit worker against worker, drive levels of inequality to almost unimaginable levels, and are in the process of devastating the ecology of the planet." Indeed. I agree. So I propose, in place of both capitalism and what is called market socialism but which is really a coordinator class ruled economy that is better called market coordinatorism - participatory economics. I claim it is classless. I claim it attends to true social costs and benefits including ecological ones. I claim it creates a context in which workers and consumers have shared rather than opposed interests and operate via cooperative rather than competitive allocation. I claim this system attains equity rather than vast inequality. Do I claim these things due to an obsessive irrationality that is shared with other advocates? That's not for me to judge.

The Final Tally:
No Going Back
Schweickart says, "But a life preoccupied with negotiating work complexes [read: once a year balancing job complexes], forecasting one’s future consumption [read: during a once yearly planning process], revising lists [read: ditto], scrutinizing the consumption lists of one’s anonymous neighbors [read: no one but a lunatic would do this, nor would doing it have any effect], posting notes on the qualitative aspects of desired purchases [read: such as letting consumers know that a certain kind of work is horrendously debilitating and dangerous which is why supply for its products is being held down, or letting producers know that a climate change or simultaneous collapse of old heating units is the cause of a greatly unexpected rise in demand for boilers so that workers ought to quickly accommodate it], and voting on national plans vastly more complicated than the Federal Budget [read: to facilitate planning that is already almost complete choosing modest differences in some key large scale variables by vote] is not the answer."

Okay, I relent. If one can find a way to attain economic justice and equity, self management, and classlessness, that doesn't have these (for Schweickart) incredible debits, that's fine by me. It would certainly be worth considering very seriously. But the idea that the way to attain truly just outcomes is to retain markets, corporate divisions of labor, and remuneration for power or output, I find less than unconvincing.

Parecon is for me a classless, self managing, economic system out there in possibility space that we can try to discern and reveal, and that we can also work toward attaining, refining our understanding of it, and our implementations of aspects of it, and even our implementations of all of it, as we learn more about its properties. Yes, I admit, I take this as a matter of (I hope well informed) faith. I assume a classless economy is possible. I can't know that for sure, however, as yet. And in the book Parecon I tried to discern and describe some of that classless, self managing, economy's key features as best I could, to help facilitate making the economy real, not just possible, before too many more souls are sundered by obsessive, implacable, irrational, class division.

I Still Think It's Nonsense

March 15, 2006

By David Schweickart

This essay replies to Albert: Criticism Without Comprehension
Albert is wrong here. It most certainly did occur to me as I worked on my critique that maybe I was missing something—although I couldn't see what. (As I pointed out, Parecon boasts a luminous set of endorsements.) So I read his lengthy reply with care. But you know what? I'm more convinced than ever that there is something deeply irrational about his project.

Not the general considerations that motivate the effort. I too want to live in a world without exploitation, where everyone has good, empowering work, where income differentials are reasonable, and where consumers are not manipulated into seeking happiness in things that are not good for them as individuals or for our fragile ecosystem. I too believe that a better world is possible, that there is an alternative, not just to the rapacious brand of corporate capitalism that dominates the earth today, but to capitalism itself. I happen to think that our best bet is Economic Democracy—the structure of which I will mention shortly.

What is irrational, or at least wholly untenable, is the economic model Albert defends as a workable means of obtaining these desirable ends. What is irrational (so it seems to me) is his inability to grasp the force of the criticisms of the model.

I have to say, I admire Albert for posting my article on his website. I had thought of asking him to do so, but I didn't think he would be willing to post so harsh a critique. There aren't many intellectuals who would take such a risk.

I also admire the tone of his article. To be sure, he gets testy at times, but my article was nothing if not provocative. For the most part his tone was measured and his presentation of my position accurate. I will try to follow his good example in what follows.

An Alternative Model

Before getting to the particulars of my reply, let me sketch the basic institutions of what I take to be an alternative to capitalism different from Parecon that is both feasible and at the same time
vastly superior to capitalism: ecologically sustainable, more efficient than capitalism, more rational in its development, more egalitarian, more democratic, more inclined to promote leisure and meaningful work over mindless consumption. I call it Economic Democracy.

I can't defend here the claim that Economic Democracy has the merits just mentioned. I have done so at length elsewhere, most recently in *After Capitalism* (2002). Let me simply note that Economic Democracy is a form of market socialism wherein enterprises are managed democratically by their workforces, and investment is allocated, not by market forces, but by democratically-accountable public banks. In effect Economic Democracy replaces two of the three markets that constitute capitalism with more democratic alternatives. It maintains a competitive market for goods and services, but replaces the labor market with workplace democracy and the capital market with social control of investment.

Needless to say, Albert, a self-proclaimed "market abolitionist," cannot endorse this model, but it is important for the reader to understand that there are alternatives to capitalism other than Parecon. Albert often writes as if criticism of Parecon is tantamount to embracing capitalism. Indeed, he is convinced that markets of any kind "inexorably induce a class division in which about 20% of the population overwhelmingly determine economic outcomes and the other 80% overwhelmingly obeys instructions, . . . compel against everyone's will surplus maximization and endless accumulation, and . . . make a travesty of democracy," so there is no point in making fine distinctions. I think there is.

*Parecon: Critique and Reply*

Let me rehearse briefly the main points of my critique. Parecon has three fundamental components.

- All job-complexes are to be equally empowering, both within enterprises and across the economy as a whole.

- Remuneration is to be based on effort only, not on one's contribution to society, for the latter includes such morally irrelevant factors as talent, training, job assignment, tools and luck.

- All elements of production and consumption—labor, resources, consumer goods—are to be allocated by participatory planning, not the market.
In “Nonsense on Stilts” I argue that

A. Achieving balanced job complexes in the manner suggested by Albert, namely, breaking existing jobs into tasks, assigning each task a numerical rank, reassembling them so that all jobs equally empowering, then deciding who does what, is not even remotely feasible.

B. Remuneration according to effort won’t work because those making the decisions have neither the means nor the motivation to make accurate assessments.

C. Participatory planning of an entire economy would be a nightmare, for at least four reasons:

1. Consumption requests are public, which greatly compromises individual privacy.

2. These requests must be made annually by every citizen, each of whom must look at his past year’s consumption, forecast changes, then make careful, quantitative adjustments. Doing this even once is a hugely tedious undertaking. Doing it several times, as will be required under Parecon, is mind-boggling.

3. Unless requests are made in excruciating detail, producers won’t know what to produce. In any event, they have little motivation to find out what people really want, so production will not come close to optimizing consumer satisfaction.

4. A national vote to choose among several highly aggregated final plans is a meaningless exercise, since few if any individuals would have the time, ability or motivation to make an intelligent choice.

Albert’s reply to these criticisms may be summarized briefly as follows.

To A: Sure it’s difficult to balance job complexes, but it should be done anyway. Moreover, he never meant his discussion as to how this might be done to be taken literally.

To B: Work must not only involve effort, but it must also be socially useful to merit remuneration. Moreover, each enterprise has a fixed pool of income to distribute among its workers, so evaluators do indeed have an incentive to be accurate and fair. (“I don’t know how Schweickart missed all this," he says (CwoC: 9).
To C: Markets are worse. Regarding my specific charges, Albert says:

1. Schweickart is wrong. The process is anonymous.

2. The procedure need not be tedious. General categories may be used. It’s much less time-consuming than shopping.

3. Producers have a host of ways of determining what people want. It is scare-mongering to suggest that producers wouldn’t do their best to find out what people want and meet their demands.

4. He doesn’t see the problem.

My Reply to His Reply Re. A

Albert acknowledges that balanced job complexes would be quite difficult to achieve and certainly could not be achieved by some idiotic mechanical calculation such as the one set out in detail in his major chapter on the topic, which I took seriously enough to think through concretely. That was only a thought-experiment, he now says, a way of explaining the conceptual possibility of achieving such an end.

In fact I stated explicitly that Albert didn’t think this procedure could be implemented with precision. I quoted from his book that in real circumstances the procedures of job balancing are not precisely as we describe above (P: 106). (Notice, he doesn’t call them in the book, just not precisely as described.) But I went on to note that he gives us no clue as to what other, more realistic procedures he might have in mind. To the question, In practical, real world situations, could workers really rate and combine tasks to define balanced job complexes within and across workplaces? he merely asserts (with great confidence), Provided we understand that we are talking about a social process that never attains perfection, but that does fulfill workers’ own sense of balance, the answer is surely yes (P: 110).

In his reply to my critique, he takes a small step toward being more concrete. He says we could begin at Loyola (my university) by offering some training to staff so that they could do more empowering work, and that we could let the custodians, "perhaps with a little training, perhaps not even needing that," do some of the empowering tasks the deans now do. (He doesn’t say what "empowering tasks" these might be.)
That’s as good as it gets, in concrete terms.[iv]

Let me be clear. I am in no way suggesting that jobs shouldn’t be redesigned so as to spread around the drudgery and to make everyone’s work as meaningful as possible. One of the great merits of a democratically-run firm (the basic enterprise form of Economic Democracy) is that it allows for this possibility. If firms become all the more productive from doing so, that’s great. If workers have to sacrifice some efficiency, and hence some income, but feel it worth it, well and good. That’s their choice—as it should be.

If this is all Albert means, finally, by balance, then we are not in disagreement.

In fact, he means more that that. For he wants to insure that job complexes are also balanced across enterprises. But this would require

a) some reasonably objective, quantifiable standard as to the average "empowerment" or "meaningfulness" of every workplace in the country,

b) some sort of "central committee" with the authority to insist that workers in the more empowered workplaces spend part of their work-year in less empowered places, and

c) some means of insuring the people get transferred in such a way that each enterprise in the country winds up with the right number of people with the requisite skills after all the reshuffling has taken place.

I leave it to the reader to decide if these requirements are feasible or desirable.

My Reply to His Reply Re. B

In replying to my objection as to the unfeasibility of rewarding only effort, Albert adds two crucial elements to his model that are lacking in the original presentation. These go a long way toward blunting my objection that within a firm evaluators have neither the means nor the motivation to
evaluate their peers fairly. But these additions are both highly problematic--unless one is willing to have the enterprises operate in a competitive market.

Albert now insists that an individual's effort as well as the output of the enterprise itself must be "socially useful." By this he means that production must be organized efficiently.

My firm has to provide outputs to society commensurate to its labor and technical assets, inputs and time spent, if all its effort is to be judged socially useful. If my firm doesn't do that, the overall remuneration for my firm's employees will go down, because not all its labor was socially useful (CwoC: 8).

He also now insists that each enterprise is given a specific pool of money to pay out in wages, so that the enterprise evaluation committee does indeed have an incentive to be honest and fair, not simply give everyone high evaluations. (Parecon-Wobegon)

Let me focus my response here on the enterprise. Albert states repeatedly in his reply that enterprises received a fixed sum--a "pool of payments that the firm's output warrants" given the assets under its control. He notes that "total remuneration available to our workforce would be reduced [if] some of the labor we did was socially useless, or was carried out at low intensity relative to average" (CwoC: 8).

He wonders how I could have missed all this.

Well, for one thing, the fact that each enterprise is be allotted a fixed pool of money to be allocated among its workers is nowhere mentioned in Parecon. Or at least I've not been able to locate any such mention. I reread Chapter 7 (Remuneration). There he raises the question, "What's to prevent the whole workforce from exaggerating their effort?" He says he'll take that matter up in the next chapter. I reread Chapter 8 (Allocation). No mention of the problem in the section "Measures of Work," or anywhere else in the chapter, so far as I could tell. Maybe this crucial stipulation is given somewhere else. If so, I would be grateful to Michael if he would, in his reply to this, supply me with the relevant quote.

As for labor needing to be "socially useful," he does say that "by effort we mean anything that constitutes a personal sacrifice for the purpose of providing socially useful goods and services" (P: 152), but he says nothing about the labor counting as less socially useful if it is performed
inefficiently. Nor does he say anywhere in Parecon that a firm will be penalized if its level of effort is less than average intensity.

I suspect there is a reason for these omissions. If enterprise incomes are to be allocated according to the double criteria, social usefulness (efficiency) and degree of average effort, two troublesome questions emerge.

1) **How is the degree of social usefulness and the degree of average effort to be determined?** Notice, we are speaking here of a quantitative measurement, not just a loose qualitative judgement. If the workers in Enterprise A and Enterprise B all put in thirty hours per week, but those in Enterprise A receive, say, $40,000 per worker and those in Enterprise B receive $50,000, those in Enterprise A are entitled to know the precise reason for the precise penalty. Was their workplace inefficiently organized by industry standards? Were they slackers by society-wide standards? How was the $10,000-per-worker penalty calculated?

2) **Who is going to make this determination?** Workers within an enterprise may well capable of monitoring the efforts of their cohorts--particularly if they are allowed to take output into consideration--but they are in no position to assess the efforts of workers elsewhere. Nor are they in any position to say whether or not their efforts have been, collectively, as "socially useful" as those of other firms.

With Albert’s new stipulation, each person’s income in Parecon depends, not only on the evaluation one receives from one’s peers, but also on the judgement of a national board, located far away, which must pass judgement on the collective efforts of one’s peers and the degree to which the firm’s output was socially useful.

A brief comparison with Economic Democracy on this point is in order. Workers under Economic Democracy, like those under Parecon, have a fixed pool of income to allocate among their peers. Their pool, however, is the net profit their enterprise has made. It is not determined by a central allocation board off in Washington, or wherever. The workers may, if they so choose, agree to reward everyone according to effort, as under Parecon, but they might also choose to reward skill or seniority or managerial responsibility more highly. It is their decision. In any event, every worker has an incentive to work conscientiously and to see that their peers do also. They also have a direct incentive to organize the enterprise as efficiently as possible.

To be sure, firms under Economic Democracy compete with one another for customers, and hence may be tempted to mislead consumers and avoid the true costs of production--a market drawback--
but at the same time they are not subject to the judgments of far-removed authorities as to whether they are working hard enough or with the appropriate degree of efficiency. Which means they will not be tempted to cook their books or use other means to induce their external evaluators to give them high marks for effort and social usefulness.[vi]

*My Replies to His Replies Re. C*

Let me reply briefly to each of the four issues listed above.

1. Albert says that my concern about lack of consumption privacy is misplaced, since all consumption requests will be anonymous. Again I couldn't find him saying that anywhere.

   * He does say that "every consumer participant negotiates through successive rounds of back and forth exchange of their proposals with every other participant" (P: 128).

   * He does say that "individuals present their consumption requests to neighborhood councils which collectively approve or disapprove the requests" (P: 130).

   * He does say that "while no consumption request justified by an effort rating is denied by a consumption council without a very good reason, . . . neighbors could express an opinion that a request was unwise" (P: 152).

Maybe this could all be done without revealing the identity of the individuals involved, but that seems unlikely. It's certainly not an issue Albert addresses.

2. Albert fails to see any problem with each individual, at the beginning of each year, having to pull up her list of all the things she consumed last year, then adjust it for the coming year. And then revise it several times, as prices change, due to imbalances between proposed supply and requested demand. He thinks this would be much better than "shopping and escaping ads."[vii] I'm not so sure everyone would agree. (What would be done with those people who fail to turn in their lists or fill out the forms sloppily or keep turning in requests that exceed their budgets. Let them starve? Talk to them nicely? Shoot them, when patience runs out?)

He adds that not everyone need submit detailed consumption proposals. For those not wanting to go to all that trouble, they can just focus on a set of categories, not specific items. You need not
specify how much chicken or duck you’d like to consume during the coming year, he says. You can just note (pounds of) poultry or just say (a hundred pounds of) "meat."

But it’s not clear that this helps much. Albert seems not to have noticed that when one uses general categories, one must still specify a quantity. I can't just say "meat," or "vegetables," or "office supplies." Facilitation boards need to know how much of these items are needed—which means units need be specified. Pounds may work well enough for "meat," but what units are appropriate for vegetables or office supplies or clothing or car repairs or birthday gifts? These lists are going to have to me far more detailed than Albert imagines.

Having last year's list on hand doesn’t help much. I look at the first two items on my list. Last year I consumed 286 pounds of "meat" and ate sixteen avocados. How much meat do I want to consume this year, and how many avocados? I fill in the data, and continue through the thousands of items on the list, "massaging the numbers" so that the total amount I want to spend corresponds to the total amount of income I expect to receive. Of course, if I expect my life—and hence my consumption patterns—to be exactly the same the coming year as it was last year, I can just fill in the same numbers as last year. I may still have to adjust things a bit, at least on the later rounds, since prices will change. But what if my life is not the same? What if I don't want it to be? How do I forecast my future consumption wants? Albert assures us that we can make adjustments along the way—which means calling up those lists again, redoing them, sending them off to facilitation boards, who convey the changes in demand to producers, who must decide if they want to work more (or less) in this area or that so as to accommodate the changes.

3. Here we are at the heart of the matter regarding non-market allocation. Albert doesn't seem to recognize—despite my pressing the point in my critique—that if consumers don't specify in detail what they want, then producers—who must produce specific items, not general categories—will have great difficulty in knowing what to produce. Worse still, they will have little incentive to find out.

Albert tells us that in Parecon "there are no competing companies producing products, only 'product industries' creating diverse styles and qualities of different goods for different purposes, all with the intention that everyone gets what best meets their needs" (P: 217).

He asserts that "statistical studies enable facilitation boards to break down total requests for generic types of goods by the percent of people who will want different types of records, soda or bicycles" (P: 217). In his reply to my critique he says that producers will be "sensible at what they do, and therefore have a host of ways of knowing the proportion of people in various sizes, and favoring various colors" (CwoC: 14). He adds that consumers "can adapt their choices as the year progresses and so too can producers adapt their products."

This is a shockingly inadequate answer to what has long been recognized as two of the most basic problems with comprehensive economic planning:
Without detailed information from consumers, producers cannot know what people want. The fact the goods are purchased is not, in itself an indication. "If parecon producers offer up skirts or sweaters people don't like, people won't purchase them at distribution centers and styles will be changed," he says (CwoC: 15). But if nothing else is available, consumers will take what they can get. The drab, ill-fitting clothing offered to citizens of the Soviet Union was usually purchased.

Moreover, producers have no motivation to figure out what consumers really want. Enterprises in the Soviet Union were given production quotas—which they tried to fulfill in the easiest manner possible. (One is reminded of a Soviet-era cartoon: a flat-bed truck pulling out of a factory carrying one gigantic nail. "We were asked to produce ten tons," the factory manager beamed.)

Will nail factories—and all other enterprises—in Parecon be given production quotas from facilitation boards? If so, why should they not try to satisfy the quotas as conveniently for themselves as possible? Alternatively, enterprises can be told to decide as best they can what and how much to produce, and that their income will depend on how well their products sell. That is to say, Parecon must cease to be a parecon and become a form of market socialism.

Albert's hostility to markets blinds him to the astonishing amount of information that markets collect and synthesize, and the degree to which markets motivate enterprises to respond to consumer demand. People don't have to plan their consumption a year in advance—or even a day in advance. There is no need for facilitation boards to collate these lists, decide which enterprises should be asked to produce which goods, in what quantities and for delivery on what dates. We do not need to rely on the good will of the producers to make an effort to disaggregate the quotas assigned them in such a way as to maximize consumer satisfaction.

In a market economy each purchase is a signal to the producer that the article in question is in demand, where it is in demand, and when it is in demand. Producers are highly motivated not only to satisfy these demands, but to introduce new or improved products that people might come to prefer.

To be sure, the mechanism is not perfect. "False needs" can be created. The true costs of production (especially to the environment) can be understated. But these defects, which can be addressed with suitable regulation, pale in comparison with the defects inherent in trying to regulate an entire economy via the allocational mechanisms proposed in Parecon. (Note--the
markets whose virtues I am touting are markets for goods and services, not labor or financial markets. Economic Democracy proposes alternative to these latter, far more pernicious markets.

4. Finally, there's the matter of that final vote. Recall the procedure. Everyone--each of our 150 million or so households--fills out an annual consumption request and makes a commitment to work the hours necessary to balance that request. Communities and enterprises also submit requests--for infrastructure improvements, for funds to purchase new technology, etc. Since overall supply and demand don't balance at first, these proposals are sent back several times for modification. Then the top facilitation board sends out to all of us five plans. "What would distinguish the five plans is that each would entail slightly different total product, work expended, average consumption and average investment" (P: 138). We are then asked to vote. Which one of the five would we prefer? In his reply to me he sees no problem with "choosing modest differences in some key large scale variables by vote" (CwoC: 23).

I am truly baffled by Albert's inability to grasp the issue, his inability to put himself in the place of an average citizen, presumably conscientious, who wants to make an intelligent choice. How would she decide which of slightly different sets of total product she prefers? ("Total product" refers to the total output of goods and services for the year.) Which amounts of "total work expended" would she prefer? Which levels of "average consumption" and "average investment" seems best to her? Presumably, she can go into the data base with her computer and see what each of the five plans means for her own consumption allocation and work requirements, and whether her enterprise's new investment proposal was funded, and whether her community's requests have been honored. That is to say, she must pour over five different plans, each with (at least) four different categories, all of which "differ slightly" in general, but may differ significantly in their impact on her. Then she must vote. Or, if she is truly public-spirited, she will worry about the differing impacts of the differing plans on other people also, other enterprises than her own, other communities. Back to the computer. More comparisons to make.

Why does Albert want to put people through all this? Because he doesn't want markets to play a role in translating consumer and worker choices into total output, nor does he want the top facilitation board to impose a final plan--as was done under Soviet central planning. He wants the citizens of Parecon to be able to say they chose their own plan, democratically. Let me reaffirm what I said in "Nonsense": such a vote is a meaningless exercise.

Which is not to say that there should be no democratic control over the overall direction of the economy. I think there should be--which is why investment funds are generated via taxation in Economic Democracy and plowed back into the economy via a network of democratically-accountable public banks. The point is, it is not markets in toto that need be replaced by democratic mechanisms, only certain markets--e.g., the financial markets.
In Conclusion: Three Final Points

Let me conclude with three points of a more philosophical nature, the first concerning Albert's conception of human nature, the other two concerning ethical matters.

1. There is a deep contradiction at the heart of Albert's project. On the one hand, Parecon requires a massive amount of effective, conscious coordination (committees, councils, facilitation boards, etc.) yet Albert is deeply hostile to "coordinators." This hostility may derive from Albert's view of human nature. At first sight, Albert seems to be deeply sanguine about human nature. If there is no "coordinator class" twisting everything to their advantage, people will cooperate willingly, develop their talents appropriately and take on major responsibilities without the incentives of status, power or extra income. Yet, on closer investigation, we see that his view of human nature is not so sanguine. For he is convinced that any group of people who come to exercise authority on a non-rotating basis, even when subject to democratic accountability, will inevitably abuse this authority and consolidate themselves into an exploiting class. That's just the way people are, he seems to think. Therefore, we must design our economy so that no one is ever in a position of authority long enough to consolidate his grip on power.

Albert appears not appreciate the skills involved in managing complex enterprises, working effectively in democratic assemblies, making difficult decisions in such a way as to minimize resentment and promote the common good. Like Lenin, Albert assumes that managerial tasks are now so simple that almost anyone, with a little training, can do them.

All citizens become employees and workers of one national "syndicate." All that is required is that they should work equally, should do their regular share of the work and should receive equal pay. The accounting and control necessary for this have been simplified by capitalism to the utmost, till they have become the extraordinarily simple operations of watching, recording, and issuing receipts, within the reach of anybody who can read and write and knows the first four rules of arithmetic.[viii]

That's what Lenin thought before the revolution. Not quite Parecon, but not far removed. Trying to manage an actually existing economy proved to be not so simple.

Economic Democracy does not underestimate the need for talented, conscientious, socially-responsible managers. (Having taught at Loyola University under both good and bad administrators, I can testify that competent administration makes a huge difference. The problem
at Loyola is not that we--faculty, staff and students--can do without administrators. The problem is, the top administrators are not accountable to us, but to an absentee Board of Trustees, who have shown themselves to be much slower in perceiving incompetence than those of us more immediately affected.)

Economic Democracy does not underestimate, either, the importance of giving upper management a significant degree of autonomy. If administrative decisions are second-guessed and vetoed at every turn, few people will want to assume responsible positions--and those that do will tend to be far from the most competent. The trick to effective worker-self-management is not to *abolish* professional "coordinators," but to strike the right balance between administrative autonomy and democratic accountability. Albert thinks human nature stands in the way of avoiding exploitation this way. I disagree.

2. Albert chides me, a philosopher, for not paying enough attention to the ethical underpinnings of Parecon. I did remark on what I take to be the "obsessive egalitarianism" of his project. He doesn't see anything "obsessive" about his egalitarianism. He wonders if I feel good about NBA players making fifty, even a hundred times what I do. He wonders if I would feel good working in a plant where managers exist and make ten or twenty times more than me.

The fact of the matter is, it bothers me not at all that NBA players make so much. These people have talents I can't dream of possessing. Such high incomes may not be good for their character, but--this is the important part--their incomes in no way detract from the quality of my life; indeed watching them in action enriches it.

As for managers, I think good ones are essential to an efficient enterprise. I think their skills and dedication should be honored and rewarded. I don't think that managers of an enterprise need make ten or twenty times what average workers make, but there is little danger of that happening in a worker-run enterprise, where salary differentials have to be approved by the firm's members. If in fact managerial skills are so scarce that workers have to pay such salaries to retain good "coordinators," they should have the right to do so, but there is no reason to think that managerial talent (although real and important) is in such short supply.

I dream of a society without poverty or involuntary unemployment, where opportunities for meaningful work and significant leisure are abundant, and consumption patterns are sustainable. If there are still hierarchies of authority in such a society and material inequalities unrelated to effort, so be it. I think that a political project that focuses on *abolishing* hierarchies of authority and all inequalities unrelated to effort is deeply misguided. It has lost sight of what is really important. Hierarchies and inequalities need be kept in check by democratic procedures, but they are not, in themselves, the enemy.
3. Let me conclude by considering another ethical matter, one that was included in an earlier, much longer version of "Nonsense on Stilts" than the one posted by Albert. Let's call it "democratic alienation."

Albert stakes almost everything on the notion of participatory democracy. Parecon, he claims, will avoid both the authoritarian structures of Soviet planning and the coercive laws of market competition. Democracy is the antidote to both these moral poisons. But Albert seems not to understand that democracy does not necessarily promote solidarity. Democracy, even the most participatory, can itself be deeply alienating.

First of all, there's the problem of "democratic distance." There are no hierarchies in Parecon, says Albert; there is no "controlling class" of experts or managers. Instead, Parecon is awash with democratic assemblies: consumer and worker councils at the neighborhood, city, county, state and national levels, where important decisions are to be made. But such nested series of councils imply that a citizen votes for people (neighborhood level) who vote for people (city level) who vote for people (county level) who vote for people (state level) who vote for people (national level) to make binding decisions. Either that, or each citizen votes for her preferred candidates at all of these levels. In either case, the average citizen is far removed from the various loci of power, which are, in fact, hierarchically arranged. The plain truth is, there is no avoiding hierarchies of power in a large, complex society—or the discontent, at least among some, that these hierarchies inevitably breed.

Secondly, there's the "inequality of democracy." All participants in the various assemblies (and in society at large) face each other as equals in Parecon. But as anyone who has participated in a democratic assembly knows, all are not in fact equal. Some are quicker on their feet than others, some have more rhetorical skill, some are better adept at the formal rules of the game, some are more intimidating, some are more stubborn, some are more at home in the dominant culture of the assembly, etc. (I suspect that Albert is well-endowed with these advantages, which perhaps makes him more sanguine about democratic decision-making than is warranted.)

Please notice, these inequalities exist quite apart from the power-inequalities that so corrupt our present political system. Albert is sensitive to the latter inequalities, but he seems blind to the other kinds of inequalities that exist among human beings.

Thirdly, there is the fact that democratic decision-making, even among people of good will, even when the participants are equally endowed with the skills necessary for effective democratic participation, can be (and often is) experienced negatively. Inevitably, people will have different
views concerning economic priorities. Debating these differences endlessly, particularly the minor points, can often feel like—and be—a waste of time. Such debates can engender cynicism, apathy, even bitterness. (Allowing a majority or supermajority cut off debate, which Albert does, does not solve the problem. It might even intensify the discontent if those cut off feel themselves to be an aggrieved minority.)

These three points do not constitute an argument for authoritarianism. They do, however, caution against over-reliance on an important yet delicate tool that can be damaged by careless use. The same is true for the market. The same is true for planning. All three of these mechanisms must be handled with care if they are not to lead to consequences quite other than those intended. If we want an economic system to be both economically viable and ethically desirable, we must use all three of these instruments judiciously, employing them in such a way that the strengths of each offset weaknesses of the others. Markets must be utilized to counteract "democratic overload." Planning must supplement markets, to offset their irrationalities. Democratic assemblies must set the rules for markets and hold the authoritarian tendencies of planners in check. An efficient, rational, humane economy must be a three-way dialectic (a "trialectic?") of plan, market and democracy.

[i] Michael Albert, "Critique without Comprehension: Responding to David Schweickart Regarding Parecon," February 24, 2006. This posting replies to my article, "Nonsense on Stilts: A Critique of Michael Albert's Parecon," which Albert also posted on the Z-Net website on the same date. Both are currently available on the Parecon website, zmag.org/parecon, under the heading "Schweickart Lambasts/Albert Replies." They have also been posted on the Solidarity Economy website, www.solidarityeconomy.net.

[ii] For a more technical defense, both economically and philosophically, of basically the same model, see my Against Capitalism (Cambridge University Press, 1993). This latter work also includes a critique of the model that he and Robin Hahnel were advocating at the time, which is now called "parecon." I have truncated Albert's long list of market defects, which is repeated like a mantra throughout CwoC, and indeed throughout Parecon and his other writings on the subject. One might suspect he doth protest too much. Vehement repetition should not substitute for careful analysis. Market consequences depend on which markets operate and on the network of regulations and mechanisms of redress within which they function.

[iii] "Critique without Comprehension" p. 21. (Henceforth I'll give the page numbers in the text of this reply, preceded by either "CwoC" for "Critique without Comprehension" or "P" for "Parecon") I have truncated Albert's long list of market defects, which is repeated like a mantra throughout CwoC, and indeed throughout Parecon and his other writings on the subject. One might suspect he doth protest too much. Vehement repetition should not substitute for careful analysis. Market consequences depend on which markets operate and on the network of regulations and mechanisms of redress within which they function.

[iv] Albert is not at a loss for abstract suggestions: "We move toward balance by making changes in a social adjustment, many steps taken over considerable time, first won by movements seeking reforms, but then later enacted by self-managing workers' and consumers' councils" (CwoC: 4). I don't find this sort of handwaving helpful. Nor do I find helpful his extended argument that if we managed to set up an economy of balanced job complexes, it wouldn't be hard to maintain that balance. I'm skeptical of this conclusion, but it's not worth arguing about if no plausible story can be told as to how we might get to our happy state in the first place.
I don't think Albert intends "socially useful" to be a moral category, in the sense that caring for the sick is more "socially useful" than, say, brewing beer. It would blatantly contradictory to insist that effort is the sole criteria for remuneration and at the same time say that the more socially useful forms of effort be rewarded more.

It is open to Albert to reply that the pool of income available to an enterprise is simply the "value-added" to the final product by its workforce, i.e. the difference between the cost of the inputs and value of the output. But this raises the question: how is the "value" of the output to be determined? There are two possible solutions. If our widget factory makes N widgets, and the Parecon price for a widget is $p, we can simply multiply these numbers. The value of the output is $pN. The firm gets this whether or not everything that is produced is sold. The other is to simply let the enterprise keep the money they receive from the sale of their products. If they can't sell all N of their widgets, the labor expended in producing them is deemed less socially useful, and so their incomes drop. Each of these solutions is problematic. If the first is adopted, then workers have no incentive to be sensitive to consumer preferences or produce quality products, since their income is independent of sales. (More on this in the next section.) Moreover, their output will have to be carefully monitored to insure that they are indeed producing as many widgets as they say they are. If the latter, which is essentially the market solution, firms will have to compete with one another for sales, and hence be tempted to mislead and manipulate consumers--precisely the sort of behavior Albert rails against. Notice too, in either case, enterprises will try to avoid the "true costs" of their production, since these costs, if assessed, will diminish their "value-added."

Albert doesn't say so explicitly, but apparently there won't be any "shopping" in Parecon. Presumably, one simply goes to the local distribution point once a week or so and picks up the items one requested for delivery on the dates specified in your annual proposal.

Schweickart's reply to my reply gives me a gigantic mound of commentary to react to - as against what I think are more pressing tasks. I actually very much favor serious debate and exchange, and would even in this case with Schweickart repeatedly calling me irrational, etc., but I have to admit that I don't think Schweickart is taking the issues and words seriously, or honing in on centrally important matters. In short, I don't think he wants to move forward. It seems, rather, that he is intent on finding ways of interpreting words or even putting them in my mouth, as well as making assertions about my views that are contrary to what my views are, that enable him to take a dismissive tone and to imply all kinds of horrible possibilities that, if taken as plausible, would sensibly deter readers from judging parecon for themselves. Why bother reading about a new proposal at any length if it is as idiotic as Schweickart implies? To answer all of Schweickart's comments would entail a book presenting participatory planning, balanced job complexes, etc. Answering these kinds of concerns, and others that are more substantial, in fact, is why I wrote the book in the first place. Indeed, Part Four of Parecon: Life After Capitalism, is seventy pages responding to concerns and criticisms of the model, including most of those that Schweickart raises in his review, for example regarding feasibility, incentives, intrusiveness, etc. So my best answer to Schweickart is really to just say, please, go read the book yourself. But, there is a sense in which that would be dismissive of Schweickart himself...so, I shall respond to him here, even though doing so, even in short hand, is going to run on horribly long.

**Setting the Stage**

Early on Schweickart writes "Needless to say, Albert, a self-proclaimed 'market abolitionist,' cannot endorse [my] market socialist model, but it is important for the reader to understand that there are alternatives to capitalism other than Parecon." You might think from this that I deny that there are other models. But in fact I address many such models, in my own mounds of writing and also in the book that Schweickart reviewed, and of course Schweickart knows it. He just chooses not to react to it. A review of Parecon by him could have noted, for example, that the book includes a damning critique of market socialism, and could have substantively addressed that critique. Schweickart didn't do that.

Schweickart writes "Albert often writes as if criticism of Parecon is tantamount to embracing capitalism." Maybe I am not the proper judge of this, but I think I not only don't "often write" that way, but that I never write that way. Did I do it about Schweickart, even just in one sentence? I don't believe so, which probably explains why he doesn't quote me doing it.

I do think, however, that often times (though certainly not always) criticisms of parecon by leftists are rooted in advocacy of modes of remuneration, division of labor, and forms of allocation, which I call coordinatorist, but which typically refer to themselves as market and centrally planned socialist. Schweickart is a good example of that, as he himself acknowledges.

Schweickart writes "Indeed, he [Albert] is convinced that markets of any kind 'inexorably induce a class division in which about 20% of the population overwhelmingly determine economic outcomes and the other 80% overwhelmingly obeys instructions, . . . compel against everyone's will surplus maximization and endless accumulation, and . . . make a travesty of democracy,' so there is no point in making fine distinctions." I do say the first part of the above. I do not say, anywhere, however, that "there is no point making fine distinctions." So why does Schweickart focus on what I didn't say but what he merely wrongly attributed to me, and ignore the actual substantive content about markets that I did offer?

One explanation that Schweickart may have had in mind is that I would call market socialism a class divided economy and I would call capitalism a class divided economy, and I would reject each - all
of which is true. To him, I guess it may be that my rejecting each and noting that they have something in common, class rule from above, implies that I would also urge that we need not see how they are different, or that I would deny that they are different. But this is of course absurd, not only because they are different, but because over and over I detail the differences. There is capitalism. Distinct from capitalism there is market socialism. Distinct from market socialism there is parecon. These systems are fundamentally different in institutional structure and thus in implications for social outcomes. Lots of lesser differences are important too. Maybe for Schweickart, since I condemn markets in all incarnations, he deduces or imputes that I reject noting differences between different implementations of markets, between markets with different ameliorating structures accompanying them, and even between markets with private ownership or without. But again this is all false. And, more, just to be clear, these distinctions aren't "fine" in any case, but quite substantial, of course.

When Schweickart gets to what he takes to be the heart of the matter, he repeats all his earlier assertions. Then he summarizes my reasonably extensive replies by offering one liners of his own design that he has stand in for my views, which one-liners he can then belittle, having ignored the larger substance.

Schweickart says, for example, that my reply to his rejection of balanced job complexes on grounds that they couldn't possibly be implemented is the sentiment "sure it's difficult to balance job complexes, but it should be done anyway." And he admits that "moreover, he never meant his discussion as to how this might be done to be taken literally."

Of course my reply said quite a bit more, including using his own university and a coal mine as an example, etc., but, even regarding the sentiment that he is trying to comment on, expressing it more fully it was that I agree that creating the structures of a new economy, including a new division of labor that gets production accomplished without imposing a class division will be difficult. Of course, but even so, yes, I think it should be done. And I think this difficulty should be tackled because the alternative to attaining new institutions, including a new division of labor, is to continue to suffer class division and class rule. Apparently that is still nonsense for Schweickart.

Honestly, however, I should probably note also that I think the real difficulty in attaining a parecon is marginally different than the real difficulty in attaining market socialism - the core of the real difficulty in getting to either of these systems being overcoming the opposition of existing powers by building a massive, inspired, and committed movement. I even think it may be easier to win a parecon then to win some variant of market socialism because I think building a powerful movement for parecon may be easier than building a powerful movement for market socialism, the relevant insight being that workers in industrialized societies are unlikely to engage in mass movement struggle to trade in one boss for another.

At any rate, imagine Schweickart replying to someone who said, "Gee David, it is going to be hard to overcome all the obstacles to instituting market socialism." If Schweickart wasn't writing a book in response, which is what would really be called for, he'd probably say something brief like "yes, it is going to be hard, but we should do it anyhow because suffering capitalist greed is intolerable." Well, in the same way, I say to Schweickart when he tells me that it would be harder to win and construct parecon than market socialism - "well, maybe it would be, though I don't think it is obvious, but, even if it is the case, we should do it anyhow because suffering market socialist coordinator class dominance is intolerable." However, when I reply this way, Schweickart takes it as simple minded...but, of course, it is not. Schweickart and I agree that capitalism is horrible, so that escaping it is essential no matter how difficult it turns out to be. We disagree about market socialism and about my contention that escaping or better avoiding it is also essential.
Balanced Job Complexes and Class Struggle

Turning to parecon the economic model, regarding balanced job complexes, what more is there to say about the discussion about rating tasks that Schweickart re-raises? In fact I meant that discussion to be taken as it was written in the book, as a logical explanation of a set of ideas, not a method. For Schweickart to take it as he did in the review felt to me like manipulation of the issue. Go read the book and you can judge for yourself. Not only does it introduce the ranking idea by talking about capitalism, where actual step by step ranking of course doesn't happen, but where we can nonetheless imagine it, the book then does the same for parecon. The ranking of each task is a kind of after the fact gedanken description of what a social process seeking balanced job complexes achieves...and even at that, the book makes clear over and over that in practice it is a social negotiation, not an engineering problem - and the outcome is not perfect, but is acceptable to those involved. More, in the book this is all preparatory to later descriptions of actual hypothetical job complex examples arrived by social discussion and decision. Only a nincompoop would say that we should grade every single task in an economy - what, a million, five million... - and then combine sets of them to get numeric averages of the grades, literally, as our operational methodology, and mean it as an actual instruction for behavior. Since Schweickart took it that way he concluded I must be irrational, or perhaps he was too kind to call me a nincompoop. When I told him no, that's not said or implied or meant, well, he came back with it again, denying that I offered anything more, which is simply false. There are examples, and further discussion, at length. I think Schweickart just finds it so absurd that it doesn't register.

Where do you work? Whatever...imagine a gigantic social upheaval occurring over a period of years, leading to a new economy. During this tumult, working people, throughout society, and in your workplace too, organize into work place councils and challenge old modes of decision making, remuneration, and division of labor. They win innovations, as reforms on the road to revolution, and finally the whole old system gives way to change. What occurs, more specifically, regarding the division of labor?

To some extent there is retraining, and in time this occurs not only within the workplaces, but in schools, etc. To some extent there reallocation of tasks among jobs, a regrouping of responsibilities so that jobs take on a better balance. Does this balancing of the empowering effects of work among workers happen instantly, in one big jump? Of course not. But suppose, as in Venezuela, that there is a huge social process and that during it many firms change spots even overnight...going from capitalist ownership and managerial domination, to workers' self management. Suppose further that there is a commitment to pareconish reorganization. The undertaking in each workplace is a social project, obviously. Workers examine the current line up of jobs. Workers discuss which jobs are deadening and which are empowering. Workers see how tasks can be reassigned from some of the latter jobs to the former, and vice versa. First steps of reallocating some responsibilities are taken. Some training occurs. Is the new setup perfectly balanced? Far from it. But then further steps are taken. More changes occur in who has what responsibilities and tasks. Who decides these changes? The workers councils. Are the results perfect by some engineering style cosmic accounting? Of course not. But at some point, maybe it takes a few years of periodic transition and redefinition, a set of new jobs - newly balanced jobs - is defined. Even without going further into examples as in the longer treatments of parecon, even just leaving it at this abstract description, why would anyone think this is impossible, in fact, so obviously impossible that one has to wonder about the rationality of an advocate? Job balancing for empowerment effects is no less possible then the reverse, job distorting to ensure top down control, which is to say carefully examining work and extracting empowering features into the hands of a few, and forcing rote and repetitive features into the hands of many, as was done during the development of modern market systems.
But beyond our disagreement about the possibility and difficulty of attaining balanced job complexes, here is what seems to me the heart of this particular dispute if I take Schweickart's repeated comments about this as sincere concerns. How much balancing can we in fact do? That is, to what extent can workers redefining their own workplaces disperse empowering work among the whole population, as compared to reserving it for only about 20%? Does Schweickart think we can do no better than we see all around us, so that all empowering work should be done by one set of people and so that another set of people, about four times as large, should do only rote and tedious work? If he doesn't see it that way, then how far toward each person doing a set of tasks that is broadly as empowering as the set of tasks each other person is doing can we move? Does Schweickart want to say that it doesn't matter? Does he want to say that we don't have to seek that kind of balance because there are no class issues involved and no serious questions of income and power? If so, he should say that. It would explain why he is content with modest limitations on corporate divisions of labor, and why he celebrates markets that produce and enforce those divisions of labor.

Schweickart writes, "Albert acknowledges that balanced job complexes would be quite difficult to achieve and certainly could not be achieved by 'some idiotic mechanical calculation' such as the one set out in detail in his major chapter on the topic, which I took seriously enough to think through concretely." This may be getting tedious, for the reader, I fear. But...the description in terms of numeric rankings was there to make a point and not set out a practical methodology. In replying I gave Schweickart the benefit of assuming that he honestly missed that and took it as a method when he commented on it as such - perhaps misunderstanding through poor communication by the book, rather than due to a desire to grab any possible hook for a rush to negative judgment. But now, even having read the answer to his prior comments, Schweickart chooses to write the above as if it is warranted. For him I am just dodging, not living up to my earlier words, and he was diligent. I'm sorry, it just isn't the case. Readers will have to check for themselves. But even if it were the case, why not address the real substance?

Schweickart writes, "In fact I stated explicitly that Albert didn't think this procedure could be implemented with precision." Well, more than that, the discussion utilizing rankings of tasks was to explicate the ideas, to clarify what balancing meant to accomplish by way of showing the distribution of types of task, and particularly to show that it was logically possible. And yes, I admit that the fact that Schweickart chose to treat it in the most mechanical possible way, was very odd to my eyes, even the first time, much less now too.

Schweickart says, "But I went on to note that he gives us no clue as to what other, more realistic procedures he might have in mind." Well, actually, the book even describes hypothetical workplaces, and their hypothetical balanced job complexes. My earlier reply gave examples too. In my own view, this was arguably too much specificity, not too little. But the real point here seems to me to be very different. In all Schweickart's words devoted to debunking balanced job complexes - and even ignoring what I think is his misrepresentation of what I say about them - Schweickart never addresses or even acknowledges the reasons why I favor them. I claim that if work is apportioned so that some monopolize empowering tasks and others do only what is rote, tedious, etc. - the latter group will be dominated by the former even if there are formal rules about democracy, etc. Schweickart ignores this. He doesn't say it is false; much less argue some reasons why it is false. But if it is true, then attaining balanced job complexes, however difficult it turns out to be in actual practice, even if it were much more difficult than I think, is essential if we are to avoid class rule by empowered coordinators above disempowered workers. So why not tackle that substantive issue, I wonder?
When Schweickart gets to the end of his comments on balanced job complexes, he says, "I leave it to the reader to decide [if they are feasible or desirable]." I agree with that sentiment entirely. But I hope the reader will consider what I and others who advocate parecon claim, not what Schweickart says we claim. Even more, I hope readers will exercise their own imagination and wisdom regarding the issues. The focus of all this should not be parecon as I or anyone else proposes it. The focus should be sharing a vision of a classless economy that we can all manage to cooperatively, over time, conceive and seek. If parecon helps with that, and even captures some or many of the central defining features of a worthy classless vision, as I contend it does, so much the better. But if parecon turns out to have flaws, okay we should undertake amendments, adaptations, refinements, or even complete overhaul, but we should not dismiss it as a precursor to returning our advocacy to classist structures.

My claim is that working people can forge, not instantly, and not like a perfect engineering project, job complexes that are balanced for empowerment and that are therefore consistent with classlessness, and that we can also construct an allocation system that ratifies and compatibly enhances a classless division of labor. I agree that achieving this in transition from capitalism to a parecon will take time and will involve travail, to be sure, but I also claim that maintaining such constructions once we have attained our new division of labor and our new mode of allocation will be far simpler and far less costly - which is to say far more materially productive as well as far more socially desirable - than would be defending the monopoly on empowering work held by a few that is typical of market socialism.

So this is a very real disagreement between Schweickart and myself regarding what we can even attempt, and thus also what we can achieve. As to how jobs can be redefined to incorporate a different mix of tasks than we now suffer, I give examples in the book - and in my earlier reply, too - but I don't want to make believe that I think having as extensive an answer to this query as I offer in longer presentations is mandatory at this stage. For the most part, how we attain balanced job complexes, supposing that it becomes a goal of social change, will be determined in social practice, via experience, and will vary from industry to industry. We can now usefully offer a broad picture of the kinds of thinking and alteration that move toward balance, whether within firms or across them. I did that, and I did more, actually, with hypothetical examples, in the book - but suppose I hadn't given those examples. Suppose I didn't provide a general conception of what would need to be done to have balanced job complexes, but instead said that I had no idea how to do it. And suppose I hadn't worked in balanced job complexes, myself, for that matter, and that I couldn't and didn't offer explanations of why they would be productive as well as humane. And suppose, again contrary to fact, I was even afraid that it couldn't be done, like Schweickart is (except that Schweickart seems to be happy at the thought it can't be done, not afraid that it can't be done). Even if all that were the case, I freely admit that I would still say, well, okay, we need to think about this division of labor issue and we need to find a way to attain a balance in empowerment implications among jobs, because if we don't find a way to do that, we are going to be stuck with class rule by a few over the many. I would still feel, that is, even lacking any idea how the hell to escape the past, even lacking any idea what achieving the goal would look like, even fearing that it was impossible, that if we structurally continued to opt for institutions that give a fifth of the population conditions that empower them and give four fifths conditions that disempower them, the one fifth will set agendas, determine outcomes, etc., and in time, will rule over the four fifths - and that this will happen not because the one fifth is somehow intrinsically malevolent, much less because all people are intrinsically malevolent, but because those are the outcomes that our structural choices would make natural and systemic.

In other words, even if I take Schweickart totally sincerely regarding balanced job complexes, and even if I transfer his worries about attaining them or maintaining them into my mind - which is not so easy but a good way to try to understand his position, I think - I find that I still come away with
an almost diametrically opposite inclination. And I think this fact, which I think Schweickart perceives, is what causes Schweickart to question my motives, rationality, etc. My being so hostile to class division and class rule that I wouldn't throw up my hands and say, there is no alternative to it, like he does, if I was as confused about and as doubtful of current formulations of a classless alternative as Schweickart is, means that I am irrational.

Well, first, at the current time, Schweickart's view ignores that we actually disagree, using our respective capacities for reason, and that I am not worried, as he is, about parecon being impossible. But, second, I should say that it is true that years back things were more like what I am hypothesizing when I say what if I had his fears. That is, when I was first hostile to capitalism, and when, as I studied the history of what has been called socialism, I also became hostile to market and centrally planned socialism, and when, as I looked at what anarchist and libertarian movements offered as a better system for classlessness, I also felt those formulations were not viable and convincing - I didn't throw up my hands and say there is no alternative to class division. I didn't sign to advocate markets, corporate divisions of labor, etc. I didn't become a market socialist/coordinatorist, like Schweickart thinks any serious rational anti capitalist would do. Instead, I, with Robin Hahnel, worked hard to do better for the classless stance by providing it a sounder and more compelling model to advocate, a model that we named parecon that does not embrace institutions that violate our values, but that instead offers a new way of doing economics that furthers our values.

Remuneration and Incomes

Moving on to matters of income, Schweickart says my reply to his rejection of remunerating effort and sacrifice was my saying that in his words "Work must not only involve effort, but it must also be 'socially useful' to merit remuneration. Moreover, each enterprise has a fixed pool of income to distribute among its workers, so evaluators do indeed have an incentive to be accurate and fair." Then actually quoting me he says I said, "I don't know how Schweickart missed all this." But of course I know exactly how Schweickart missed his own rendition of my words. I didn't say them in the way he implies because there is no fixed pool of income that each workplace gets independent of what it is doing. A workplace is able to disperse income to its members in accord with the level of effort and sacrifice it can claim they have expended. More work and effort that is socially useful, warrants more income for dispersal, and less work that is socially useful warrants less income for dispersal. But the actual volume of payment available to workers isn't equal to the volume of value that a workplace generates. It is based, instead, on the social average, and goes above or below that in accord with whether the workers in the plant are expending more or less than socially average numbers of hours of socially useful work.

A workplace can't successfully claim to have undertaken twice as many hours as it did, unless its output is consistent with that claim. This isn't complicated and it requires no fancy much less authoritarian oversight. It has a nuanced consequence, however. It means that if Schweickart and I and ten other people have a nice little workplace, and Schweickart is responsible for indicating worker's effort ratings and he cheats in the formulation of claims about intensity or duration (as he claims in his review that he would) giving himself and two friends highly inflated ratings for duration, and giving the rest of us only average ratings - but the whole plant in fact only generates output consistent with ten people doing average labor, then the pool of income that the plant gets to internally disperse (whether it produces bicycles or a drug that cures cancer) will equal ten times an average income. If the other seven of us let Schweickart get away with inflating his and his two friends' incomes, they will get more and we will get less of that pool of income, and we will suffer for it. It is therefore unlikely to happen.
Regarding remuneration, Schweickart says, "In replying to my objection as to the unfeasibility of rewarding only effort, Albert adds two crucial elements to his model that are lacking in the original presentation." But as far as I am aware the "conditions" I noted in the reply are in every rendition of parecon I am familiar with, my own, and other people's, though I would agree they get discussed more explicitly in some contexts - usually when dealing with detailed objections - than in others, such as trying to make a broad initial case.

Schweickart says, "Albert now insists that an individual's effort as well as the output of the enterprise itself must be 'socially useful.' By this he means that production must be organized efficiently." Not exactly, because the word efficient is easy to misinterpret, and so I would tend not to use it in the manner Schweickart attributes to me. I would say, instead, that to be remunerated labor must have socially useful output. I can't work for hours digging and filling holes and get remunerated for it. Nor can I be a drummer or a painter or many other things, because I cannot do those things well enough for my product to be socially valuable. In the same way a firm that produces some item, bicycles, if it has output which matches up to a certain number of hours of average intensity labor, can't claim to have expended twice that, and call it all socially useful. The claim would be either a lie about the actual duration, or if the hours were really spent then half the duration would have been incompetent. But Schweickart, who now understands that much, I think, still seems unable to perceive a further aspect. Suppose a place where I work produces bicycles. A place where Schweickart works produces brain surgery. The brain surgery is certainly more valuable to society than the bicycles, per hour of labor spent on each, by a huge amount. This would have no bearing, however, on the income of employees like me and Schweickart. What would matter is instead does society want the output of where we work commensurate to the assets utilized in its production (does society plan for the output to be produced) and then, when the output is produced, does the output measure up to the assets utilized. Income per member in a firm isn't higher for firms that produce more valuable output, but only for firms that expend more time per worker or more intensity per worker or that suffer worse conditions per worker while producing outputs that are sought.

Schweickart writes "[Albert] also now insists that each enterprise is given a specific pool of money to pay out in wages, so that the enterprise evaluation committee does indeed have an incentive to be honest and fair, not simply give everyone high evaluations." I don't now write that, I always do, or at least I imply it by what I do write, or I try to, though I admittedly emphasize it far more when communicating with economists, I admit, because they tend to worry far more about the associated issues. But that pool of money isn't some fixed thing, but instead varies with the volume of labor time and intensity that the firm utilizes in producing socially valuable output, as in the example above.

Schweickart says that in the book it nowhere says that "each enterprise is allotted a fixed pool of money to be allocated among its workers." Correct, because it isn't the case. I didn't say that in the reply to his review, either. The pool of income depends on the total labor duration and intensity of the workplace. He also says that in chapter seven on remuneration I didn't explain what I explained in the reply to his review. That's true. In fact, the closing sentence of the chapter acknowledges that by saying that the chapter only shows that an economy could remunerate for duration, intensity, and onerousness of work, in accord with values expounded earlier in the book, not that doing so would provide proper incentives, etc. Why not? Well, because there was still allocation to discuss and incentives and income distribution can't be properly treated without addressing allocation. The issues Schweickart is concerned with about remuneration come up in treating complaints about efficiency, productivity, etc., later in the book.

But again, let's say I wrote a book, or someone did, trying to put forth a vision of a classless economy with equitable remuneration, cooperative negotiation of outcomes, self management, etc.
And suppose they or I did overlook, or even did not understand some problem, unlike in this case. It seems like a reviewer could have two angles on that. They could grab on to it and act as though it somehow meant that no classless economy was possible because, after all, here was a description which had a flaw. They could even act as though the aspiration was demented, say, or otherwise beyond the pale, seeking to suggest that all interaction with such a perspective should cease. Or they could wonder, is the flaw correctable? Now I don't think this flaw that Schweickart believes is present is even there, in fact I am quite sure it isn't, certainly not in the model, and not in most expositions, either, but in any event I think Schweickart's rush toward the first posture is revealing.

Schweickart says, "As for labor needing to be 'socially useful,' [Albert] does say that 'by effort we mean anything that constitutes a personal sacrifice for the purpose of providing socially useful goods and services,' but he says nothing about the labor counting as less socially useful if it is performed inefficiently. Nor does he say anywhere in Parecon that a firm will be penalized if its level of effort is less than average intensity." It isn't that the labor is less socially useful if it is inefficient, it is that some of it wasn't useful at all. It could have been done more quickly, but it wasn't. It is as if the worker was sleeping some of the time, or not present at all, and was for the rest of the time working at normal intensity to be properly remunerated. More, a firm isn't penalized. What would that mean, even? Nor are its workers penalized. Nothing earned is withheld. There is no punishment going on. No fine. What is earned is forthcoming. A firm's employees are accorded a total pool of income for remuneration commensurate to the duration, intensity, and onerousness of socially useful labor they actually together expended within the firm - which sum is then allocated among the employees, now in accord with their differences in expended effort and sacrifice, as the workers judge those differences and wish to differentiate remuneration in light of them. The underlying idea here is relatively straightforward. The economy needs to remunerate for only effort and sacrifice if it is to be equitable. But the economy also needs to utilize assets properly, not rewarding useless activity, etc., if it is to avoid wasting capacities. The mechanism that permits both these ends to be achieved simultaneously is what is described above. It attends to both utilizing assets by requiring that work must be socially useful. And it provides morally sound remuneration by rewarding duration, intensity, and onerousness of socially useful labor, but not rewarding output itself.

Schweickart may actually be correct, and in fact I would be surprised and a bit embarrassed if he wasn't, that I explain things, at least as I see them, better now than I did four years ago when I wrote the book he reviewed. I hope so. But regrettably, perhaps due to my still less than optimal explanations, Schweickart is still not understanding the full situation. He seems to think that we are coming up with some social usefulness measure for the firm's output and then workers are getting an income pegged to that valuation of output. That is not the case. Again, suppose there are a hundred bicycle plants using the same technology. If Schweickart's plant claims it has put in 60 hour weeks per worker, and the others all claim 30 hour weeks per worker - note that bikes are socially useful because people want them, as evidenced by the plan settling on producing them - and Schweickart's plant generates the same number of bikes per worker as the other workplaces rather than twice as many, then either there was something wrong at Schweickart's plant, or they are lying about the hours, or are working at half intensity, or are incompetent. This isn't very complicated. And there is no need for "a far removed authority," dominating everyone, to conduct this type remuneration. Workers councils will suffice, in workplaces and whole industries. That is merely a scary ghost Schweickart invents.

Schweickart is concerned about "penalties" and "national boards" and differences in "degrees of social usefulness" between plants, and so on, all of which concerns are, however, not about any part of parecon. What is part of parecon is on the one hand a cooperative negotiation of allocation, which yields social valuations for all items, which in turn reveal outputs from all workplaces as being commensurate to or as failing to live up to claimed assets, and on the other hand another part of
parecon is worker's self management and balanced job complexes which permit and facilitate workplace councils deciding how exacting they want to be about differential incomes within their operations. None of this entails the structures or raises the issues Schweickart worries over, but a full reading is essential to determine that point, so I can only recommend that.

 Allocation

Moving on to allocation Schweickart says that I say "the [participatory planning] process is anonymous," as my reply to his asserting that it involves public display of personal choices which would be intrusive. And Schweickart is right, I did say in the reply that consumption proposals are anonymous. Of course, I also said it in the book, though perhaps not clearly enough for Schweickart, so one wonders why we are wasting time on this. But, and I hope this isn't wasting time, I think there is a deeper related point that we can examine with some gain.

Suppose I had written somewhere that personal consumption choices under participatory planning aren't anonymous, but are public. In the endless words I have written about parecon, and more words delivered in talks and interviews, maybe I even have said that - though I would be very surprised to see it. What then should be the reaction of someone reading or hearing it? It seems to me it should be to note that there is no central reason compelling or requiring such a choice in a classless economic vision. If having public display of personal consumption choices is bad, as I happen to agree with Schweickart that it would be, then don't do it. It isn't the core of the model, or even its periphery. It is a conceivable policy choice, among countless conceivable choices, that would have to be made, or that could be made, in an implementation of parecon.

In other words, like many features, a parecon could incorporate public consumption proposals, or not. If Schweickart was looking to have a serious discussion of the possibilities and issues associated with parecon as a model for achieving a classless economy, it seems to me he might say something like, "Albert, you seem to be saying we all have to parade all our choices in front of everyone else. Why would you say that? It doesn't seem in any sense essential to the structures you care about. And it doesn't seem to further the values you advocate. So what's with that?" And I'd say back, "you are right, it isn't necessary, parecon doesn't need it and I don't advocate it. We agree." And if he quoted me saying it was part of parecon, at some moment or other, I'd say back, "you are right, we can and I think we should jettison that silly utterance, of course." In fact, however, there is a chapter of the book about intrusiveness, just as there is a chapter about each of the other issues Schweickart raises, and many that he doesn't raise, and that chapter about intrusiveness most certainly does include that proposals can be anonymous in the following sentence, for example: 'And the fact that individuals can make anonymous consumption proposals if they do not wish their neighbors to know the particulars of their consumption habits keeps this [intrusiveness] from becoming a serious problem at all.'

Schweickart is worried that the mechanics of participatory planning would be unwieldy, time consuming, etc. These matters are dealt with in considerable detail in the book, actually, in more than considerable detail, perhaps even too much detail. Schweickart wasn't convinced by the discussion (assuming he saw it, that is, unlike the discussion of intrusiveness or labor having to be socially valuable or about market socialism, etc.), so much so that he thinks only an irrational person would be convinced by it. Well, okay, I don't see the point in essentially reproducing whole long chapters from the book here. I have to urge you to look and think it through for yourself. But honestly, I should make clear that I don't think reading a book about something this complex, and this important, should be alone fully convincing in any case. Rather, I think the book Parecon should at most propel further discussion, further exploration, further thought, and
when needed refinement, amendment, and even reconceptualization. Of course, that's the parecon phenomenon that Schweickart can't comprehend and wishes to terminate.

Answering Schweickart's first allocation-related jibe - "What would be done with those people who fail to turn in their lists or fill out the forms sloppily or keep turning in requests that exceed their budgets. Let them starve? Talk to them nicely? Shoot them, when patience runs out?" - I have to honestly say, is not worth the time and trouble. I would rather not credit Schweickart's repeated attempts to portray parecon as somehow authoritarian, regimented, intrusive or whatever, by his flights of verbal fancy, with the dignity of a reply that establishes that such concerns are a sensible and serious terrain for focus...other than to say, however much I would rather not have to do so, that this is drivel, in my view, and readers can simply decide for themselves by looking at fuller presentations and their discussions of possible methods, behaviors, etc., to determine who is right.

The same goes, I regret to say, for most of Schweickart's redundant comments on allocation. To reply to Schweickart, who just repeats what he wrote earlier, that preparing, refining, and deciding on participatory planning proposals would not over tax humanity I would have to repeat what I wrote earlier (as I had to above) or I would have to go on at greater length, like the book itself. That seems pointless. The reader just needs to think these things through, without preconception, based on assessing full presentations, however, and not Schweickart's retellings. And, I would also urge, if there are things about this classless model that trouble the reader, or that seem unworkable to the reader, very good. Then explore them further, and work to improve them, before falling back on any class-divided model that gives up the values we all strive for.

One last little point about allocation. Schweickart uses a footnote to complain that my objections to markets are "repeated like a mantra" (Schweickart seems to miss no opportunity to find a way to imply robotic irrationality). He says, "One might suspect [Albert] doth protest too much. Vehement repetition should not substitute for careful analysis. 'Market' consequences depend on which markets operate and on the network of regulations and mechanisms of redress within which they function." First, some "market consequences" depend on which markets we are talking about and on context, including "regulations," etc., just like some consequences of private ownership depend on ownership of what, and surrounding context, or some consequences of dictatorship demand on its scope and on surrounding structures. This is all right. But there are other consequences of markets (like for other institutional systems) that are endemic to them in any context. I am, in fact, quite careful about this distinction and in all honesty, I don't think there is any way Schweickart could be sincerely unaware of that fact. In Parecon there is far more than anti-market mantra, there is, instead, detailed argument as to why it is that markets, by virtue of pitting buyer against seller, by virtue of misaccounting transaction implications that extend beyond buyer and seller, by virtue of requiring firms to accumulate without limit including cutting costs regardless of implications for workers and communities, and so on, have horrendous implications including producing grotesque anti sociality, misvaluing everything, violating sustainability and collective needs, and imposing class division and class rule, all even in the absence of capitalist ownership relations and despite whatever regulatory agencies Schweickart might propose (and I might too, for that matter, when having to put up with markets) to ameliorate the ills. If that's a mantra, okay, better that is afoot than the more familiar market jubilee attributing to them sensible pricing, democracy promotion, etc. The anti market list has the advantage of being true. But, if Schweickart wants more than the succinct list that a reply permits, that's fine. I recommend to him the PrincetonUniversity volume Quiet Revolution in Welfare Economics, in which Robin Hahnel and I dissect markets at great length. I welcome his response to its claims.

The Broader Philosophical Points
Even as I skip offering what I think would be a tedious repeat regarding the details of allocation, I do want to address the overarching comments Schweickart ends with, because they include some new points, and consequential ones, at that.

Schweickart writes: "There is a deep contradiction at the heart of Albert's project. On the one hand, Parecon requires a massive amount of effective, conscious coordination (committees, councils, facilitation boards, etc.) - yet Albert is deeply hostile to 'coordinators.'"

Maybe this is sincere, I don't know. But if it is sincere, either Schweickart can't read or I can't write. In fact I have no problem with coordination, of course, or with coordinating, either. Only an ignoramus would reject coordination or coordinating. I do have a problem, however, with economic institutions that monopolize empowering labor in the hands of few people who then rule all others. I do have a problem, in other words, not with coordination per se - but with coordination being achieved via a few people dominating many. I am hostile to class division and class rule, and yes, I happen to call the class that monopolizes empowering tasks the coordinator class. Does Schweickart honestly think this implies that I reject coordination, or is he again just taking my words and molding them into a non existent viewpoint that he can criticize?

Schweickart continues: "This hostility [that is, the one that doesn't exist] may derive from Albert's view of human nature. At first sight, Albert seems to be deeply sanguine about human nature. If there is no 'coordinator class' twisting everything to their advantage, people will cooperate willingly, develop their talents appropriately and take on major responsibilities without the incentives of status, power or extra income."

Actually, as indicated repeatedly in all the texts about parecon, and in the book, Parecon: Life After Capitalism, that Schweickart reviewed, in a parecon, people will cooperate, will develop their talents, and will take on responsibilities not least because they will get status in the sense of admiration from others for doing so, and, even more relevant to his comment, because they will get income in accord with their effort and sacrifice while doing so, and, yes, they will not get extra power.

Schweickart says, "For [Albert] is convinced that any group of people who come to exercise authority on a non-rotating basis, even when subject to democratic accountability, will inevitably abuse this authority and consolidate themselves into an exploiting class. That's just the way people are, he seems to think. Therefore, we must design our economy so that no one is ever in a position of authority long enough to consolidate his grip on power."

That's "just the way people are," I think? That's my reasoning? Moreover, where does it say in parecon that people won't have as part of their work exercising authority? Nowhere, of course. Quite the contrary, it says some people won't have only that, while others have none of that. I guess maybe what he expressed above is what Schweickart can see in my words, but in fact, what I actually think is that if we have a set of institutions that propel people to rule others as their way to succeed in fulfilling their responsibilities, then, yes, they will rule others, and, in ruling others, supposing that doing so conveys information, skills, and dispositions necessary to decision making, in time, they will rationalize their dominant situation and defend it and will utilize their institutionally vested power in accord with their evolving class interests. But Schweickart should place note that it isn't simply that people are exercising authority that leads to class rule and subordination. Nowhere have I ever suggested that. In parecon people exercising their wills and, yes, authority, happens all the time, of course, in diverse kinds of work, as in any conceivable economy and society. The problem parecon seeks to overcome arises if one set of people are overwhelmingly empowered by their activity, and another set are overwhelmingly disempowered by theirs. In that case, the former will consistently, due to its social position, determine outcomes. The latter will consistently, due to
its social position, be ruled. But this situation arising from a capitalist or a coordinatorist economic arrangement is not a sad comment on humanity or an indication that I somehow am not sanguine about human nature (whatever exactly that is supposed to mean). This situation, which I think is essentially inexorable when one has the identified structures in place, indicates, rather, that however inclined we humans are to be sociable, caring, responsible, initiating, etc. - and I think we are mighty inclined to be all that - if we find ourselves on the one hand in small numbers constantly elevated to elite power and influence, or on the other hand in large numbers constantly relegated to drudgery and tediousness, we will all show the signs of this in our inclinations and, more so, in our capacities as well as our derivative choices. I doubt that Schweickart would deny the claim, other than in a context of trying to denigrate everything pareconish, that is.

Schweickart says, "Albert appears not to appreciate the *skills* involved in managing complex enterprises, working effectively in democratic assemblies, making difficult decisions in such a way as to minimize resentment and promote the common good."

Where do I fail to appreciate this? Or, for that matter, fail to appreciate the skills involved in being a composer, a chemist, doing design or personnel work, and on and on? Rather, I highly respect these skills that are so typically demolished even in people doing those labors, much less in everyone who has subordinate positions, now. But skills in management, coordination, planning, or surgery, and all the rest, in sum total are not such that they can be practiced only by 20% of the population, while the rest do only rote and repetitive work.

So why does Schweickart say I "do not appreciate the skills"? He says it, I suspect, because I claim people who are now occupying tedious working class jobs can do these skilled things as a part of new balanced job complexes in the future, and in his mind this is tantamount to saying there is no skill involved, since those currently rote workers, in his mind, lack the potential for such skill. That's, I am sad to say, the only explanation I can see for Schweickart making his assertion about me not appreciating the skills involved in coordinator class activity. Certainly nowhere do I say anything that indicates that, but instead, I only make arguments recognizing the untapped potentials of most of the population. I am sorry if this reading of Schweickart's logic is unfair, I am sorry if I missed a more benign explanation. And I should add, if the above formulation seems abstruse to you, simply imagine a racist saying of someone that they are denigrating skills after they talk about blacks being perfectly able to manifest them, or think of a sexist saying of someone that they are denigrating skills after they talk about women being perfectly able to manifest them. Classism is quite like racism and sexism in this dimension of implicitly or explicitly believing that the subordinate constituencies lack for brains, talent, morality, etc., rather than believing that they are systematically robbed of these capacities.

For workplaces, it turns out, for those who need it, we have ample proof of the wide presence of decision making potentials among workers. Thus, in Argentina, when capitalists and managers have in the past few years left firms for dead - firms that were unable to operate under their august auspices and were going broke, workers have taken over. These firms, thereafter, have been operated by the former rote laborers who lacked higher training and were often even illiterate. Within weeks, months at worst, virtually all these firms were back on their feet, operating well, producing quality output, etc. Apparently, the great skills of management are not beyond the capacity of the subordinate workforce even without receiving training, much less, of course, if they have training. Would Schweickart say that a formerly illiterate Argentine worker who was essentially randomly chosen and admitted to having no superior qualities to all other workers in the firm, who was now keeping her firm's financial books part time while working on an assembly line during other parts of the day, proved that the firm is backward and has no serious skills, or would he come around to say it proved that the serious skills needed in the firm are widely attainable?
Schweickart says, "The trick to effective worker-self-management is not to abolish professional 'coordinators,' but to strike the right balance between administrative autonomy and democratic accountability. Albert thinks human nature stands in the way of avoiding exploitation this way. I disagree." Actually, I think what stands in the way of accountability in coordinatorist economies, including market socialism, is a division of labor which systematically subverts it (not to mention an allocation system that produces that division of labor). And for that reason, just like parecon doesn't say we should eliminate surgery, or we should eliminate engineering, it also doesn't say we should eliminate coordinating, or even we should eliminate managing. Not at all. What parecon says - and please note, all these matters are dealt with many times over in the book, to the point where missing them would require serious effort - is that whatever huge array of tasks need to be done they need to be apportioned so that everyone is comparably prepared and empowered when trying to exercise their will in self managed decision making, which in Schweickart's terms would be so that everyone is prepared to make outcomes accountable. In other words, parecon doesn't think human nature is an obstacle to participation and self management, but, instead, that certain institutions are. I don't see how it is possible to have read the book Parecon, or even just these exchanges, and come up with my thinking that human nature is the problem.

Suppose someone said to Schweickart "I thought you were sanguine about human nature, but I see you aren't. You think it is so conducive to anti social outcomes that just because we have some people owning productive property all will go to hell in a handcart, driven there by a human nature that prevents simple restraints on the owners from working. Why can't people make owners accountable?" Schweickart would wonder, I believe, how someone could come up with such a peculiar formulation. I have the same query for him.

In responding to a question I asked about his values, Schweickart admits that "it bothers me not at all that NBA players make so much. These people have talents I can't dream of possessing. Such high incomes may not be good for their character, but--this is the important part--their incomes in no way detract from the quality of my life; indeed watching them in action enriches it." Watching them enriches Schweickart's life, true enough. But having them take huge pieces of the social product, leaving less for Schweickart, most certainly diminishes his life. That bit of reality added, and how does Schweickart miss that, it is also true that Schweickart and I apparently have different values. It seems to me this should have been what our exchange was about. Why didn't Schweickart just say, "Albert, you think it is wrong for some people to earn 1000 or 500 or 50 or 10 times as much as others for the same duration, intensity, and onerousness of work, simply due to having better tools, or working in a sector that outputs more valued products, or having been born with inborn talents that are highly valued, and I, Schweickart, don't. Here's why."

Schweikart says, "As for managers, I think good ones are essential to an efficient enterprise." Good management is essential, I agree, or we might say good organization, good planning, or good coordination, is essential - though what is good regarding these and other functions would change dramatically in a classless economy, of course. What isn't essential to "efficient enterprise," however - where efficient enterprise should mean enterprise that produces valued outputs without wasting valued assets where valued assets includes people's potentials, and without generating horrible byproducts such as anti sociality - is that all the empowering work be in the hands of about a fifth of the workers, with the rest doing only tedious and rot e functions that are controlled by others. This coordinator/worker division of labor that I reject guarantees not only that the former coordinator class members have better conditions, but that they will be unaccountable because those below will be denied not only means to influence outcomes, but information and even energy to do so.
Schweickart says he thinks "that a political project that focuses on abolishing hierarchies of authority and all inequalities unrelated to effort is deeply misguided." Me too. Who proposes that? I want to debate that person!

I want to get rid of class division and class rule, but that doesn't say that there aren't situations of authority that should persist. And nowhere do I ever suggest wanting to get rid of all inequalities unrelated to effort - not those between people of different height, weight, appearance, talent, learning, etc. I do want to get rid of differences in income owing to property, power, or even contribution to output. That's true. So why doesn't Schweickart feel a need to re-word my views to imply what I don't believe?

If Schweickart said, as he finally sort of says regarding remunerating NBA players, look there is nothing morally wrong with hugely rewarding people who are born with highly valued talents, on top of their genetic luck. Or if he finally said there is nothing wrong with rewarding those who have better tools to use, or who happen to be producing more highly valued output, more. And if he finally added that he didn't think doing so had negative economic implications either - despite having no valuable incentive effects and producing gross income inequality - okay, then we could debate our difference about that. Why is it necessary, however, to act as though if I don't agree with him about such ethical matters I must advocate eliminating all differences? Or I must doubt human nature? And so on.

Schweickart says I have "lost sight of what is really important. Hierarchies and inequalities need be kept in check by democratic procedures, but they are not, in themselves, the enemy." Okay, what if Schweickart's next door neighbor said the same thing about the minor little hierarchy that rests on remunerating property? Why not just restrain that via democracy? Schweickart would answer, well, wait, allowing that hierarchy creates a situation that both gives a class of people anti-social interests and perceptions and also subverts the possibility of democratic restraints operating well, or often even at all, regarding the prerogatives of that class of property owners. And in that case Schweickart would be right, of course. I claim that in precisely the same pattern, I am right when I say to him that having a typical corporate division of labor (as well as markets that produce that division of labor) creates a situation that both gives a class of people anti-social interests and perceptions and also subverts the possibility of democratic restraints operating well, or often even at all, regarding the prerogatives of that class of empowered actors.

In the first case, Schweickart would say we need to eliminate the structural basis for the focused class hierarchy - we need to eliminate private ownership of the means of production - and he'd be correct, and it wouldn't mean, by the way, that he wasn't sanguine about human nature or that he was irrational, etc. And in the second case I would say we need to eliminate the structural basis for the focused class hierarchy - the corporate division of labor (and also replace allocation institutions that enforce that corporate hierarchy) - and so too it doesn't mean I am not sanguine about human nature or irrational.

Schweickart says "Albert stakes almost everything on the notion of participatory democracy." That's very odd to read, like many of his assertions about my views, because I hardly ever even use the phrase "participatory democracy" - and I think never regarding parecon. Mostly that's because I am not sure what "participatory democracy" means. I do talk about self management, however, often, because I can be very clear about what that means. But beyond that, what does Schweickart mean by I "stake everything" on it? Yes, I propose an economic vision, called parecon. It rests on some key institutional commitments including balanced job complexes in workers councils, self management, remuneration for duration, intensity, and onerousness of work, and allocation via participatory planning.
Where is the "staking everything"? Is that how he describes an effort to offer a vision, argue its logic, and address concerns?

Next Schweickart writes, "Parecon, [Albert] claims, will avoid both the authoritarian structures of Soviet planning and the coercive laws of market competition. Democracy is the antidote to both these moral poisons." I never remember saying that, and I believe I never have. I don't talk about laws of market competition, but about structural implications of markets for prices, motivations, and behaviors. And I rarely talk about democracy at all, since I advocate self management, not simple democracy. But, in any event, for me the antidote to the allocative ills of Soviet planning and of markets is participatory planning. And, yes, I claim participatory planning permits and even propels self management, among many other attributes.

And then Schweickart says, "But Albert seems not to understand that democracy does not necessarily promote solidarity. Democracy, even the most participatory, can itself be deeply alienating." This is quite odd, for a few reasons. First, I don't ever remember saying a word linking democracy to solidarity. In fact, I don't even remember linking self management to solidarity, per se, which is why I have both as core values, not one standing in for the other. What I do link to solidarity, about parecon, however, is (a) that it doesn’t have structures that pit classes against one another, or that pit buyers and sellers against one another, or that pit firms against one another, and, quite the contrary, (b) that it establishes an economic context in which people have shared rather than contrary interests. And of course I often contrast this to markets, which are exactly the opposite, not producing solidarity, but obliterating it.

Schweickart says "There are no hierarchies in Parecon, says Albert." But, actually, I don't say that, have never said it, and wouldn't say it. Schweickart is using his words to stand for my views, and they are wrong. In a parecon there will be countless hierarchies, I would imagine, of diverse kinds, ranging from a conductor and her orchestra, to a surgeon and her assistants, to teachers and their students, and yes, to group leaders and their groups in all kinds of workplaces, at any given moment. What there won't be, however, are lasting hierarchies that pit people who are always above against people who are always below, whether in the way labor is divided or in the way decisions are made, and which create an abiding fault line among people, with one class systematically dominating another.

Schweickart then describes what he takes to be, I guess, some political structures that he says are hierarchical, and says I must support, and implies my doing so is contradictory. But, I don't know much about these structures, they are not part of a parecon, and whether I would like some variant of them for a polity or not, would not in any case contradict any value I have just by virtue of their incorporating hierarchy. I think Schweickart knows all this, unless he has come to be believe that I believe the things he attributes to me despite reading otherwise over and over.

Schweickart says "Secondly, there's the "inequality of democracy." All participants in the various assemblies (and in society at large) face each other as equals in Parecon." What does this attribution to parecon, one that I never wrote in such words, mean? I thing for one thing that Schweickart is talking about some political assemblies I have no knowledge of at all. But, yes, in general in a society with a parecon I would imagine that in pretty much all arenas and certainly in worker and consumer councils people will face each other as humans with equal rights. But they certainly will not face each other as equals in influence over every decision. Some will provide more information sometimes, others will do so other times. More, some decisions will affect some people more, and they will have more say, and other people will be affected less, and will have less say. Also, beyond having more (or less) relevant expertise or information, some people will be more adroit at coming up with ideas and proposals than others will be, sure, and they will be respected for it, yes, but they won't have more votes, or get more income, for that reason.
Schweikart says, "But as anyone who has participated in a democratic assembly knows, all are not in fact equal. Some are quicker on their feet than others, some have more rhetorical skill, some are better adept at the formal rules of the game, some are more intimidating, some are more stubborn, some are more at home in the dominant culture of the assembly, etc. (I suspect that Albert is well-endowed with these advantages, which perhaps makes him more sanguine about democratic decision-making than is warranted.)" What Schweickart doesn't see is that what is bad is having a social structure that produces these kinds of differences in that way systematically causing some people to always by virtue of their position in the economy dominate others to the extent that the latter are essentially disenfranchised and the former are enshrined as dominant.

Schweikart says, "Please notice, these inequalities exist quite apart from the power-inequalities that so corrupt our present political system. Albert is sensitive to the latter inequalities, but he seems blind to the other kinds of inequalities that exist among human beings." I can only say, again, the reader needs to look at what I have written to see what I think, not at what Schweickart says he sees there, or, as in this case, what he manufactures there. And, no, I am not blind to differences among people. Quite the contrary, I take into account their existence, both celebrating them for the diversity and achievement they render, and also seeking to ensure that while they benefit the human community, they do not simultaneously get turned into a basis for domination and subordination.

Without quoting his next long point word for word, it is that democratic - he could have more relevantly said self managing - decision making could be carried out in ways that are burdensome in their tediousness, and will often lead to decisions that some don't like. All this is true enough. And parecon's claim is that the solution isn't dictatorship, of course - nor is it class rule by a few. Instead we have to figure out structures of classlessness that get economic functions accomplished effectively, as well as in accord with our values, not least self management.

Schweikart ends by saying if we want a desirable economy we have to use "markets, central planning, and democracy judiciously, employing them in such a way that the strengths of each offset the weaknesses of the others." And there is a limited sense in which I agree with this. That is, if there is indeed no alternative to class divided economics, if there is no alternative to choosing among existing institutional structures, if for some reason we have to renounce all hope of attaining an economy that has no classes and that delivers to all participants equitable income and self management, which is to say if we must use markets, or central planning, and corporate organization, then we will have to try to restrain the ills of each by any means we can muster, including the means Schweickart mentions. But I don't accept that there is no alternative to class rule. Rather than accepting that roadblock to liberation, I prefer to think hard about new ways of organizing labor, determining inputs and outputs, making decisions, and remunerating people's efforts consistent with values that I aspire to - solidarity, equity, diversity, self management, and ecological rationality - instead of merely trying to make the best of institutions that trample those values. That's why I favor workers and consumers councils, balanced job complexes, remuneration for duration, intensity, and onerousness of work, and participatory planning. Call me any name you like - it is why I favor parecon.