Session 3 agenda, 9/18/03. Sociology 929, Envisioning Real Utopias. Asset Redistribution

I. General considerations

1. Conception of human nature. These discussions all seem to suppose a model of individuals as purely self-interested. This is an unsatisfactory view of motivations, especially in the family-obligation case. How should we think of the self-interest assumption? (Liz)

2. Efficiency & Productivity as values. Are these really legitimate values for a real utopian project? What about the ecological critique of growth? (Adam)

3. Reciprocity & Equality. What is the relationship between the egalitarianism proposed by B&G and the idea of “reciprocity” which they discuss in the conclusion? What are the real values underlying their egalitarianism? (Richard) How does reciprocity link to the residual claimancy argument? (Jay)

4. Evidence for the equality/productivity relation. The crisis of the European welfare states and the stagnation of the East Asian NICs suggest that B&Gs data may be out of date. (Change)

II. Specific proposals

5. Implementation & Transition infeasibility. How would the proposal actually be implemented – through taxes, loans, or what? (Cesar, Patrizia) Wouldn’t any proposal for an egalitarian redistribution of corporate assets lead to market collapse, capital flight, asset-hiding strategies, etc? How is the transition engineered? (Stuart, Richard, Eric)

6. Democratic paralysis. Doesn’t the model presuppose an unrealistically benign, cooperative democratic process? What about governance pathologies of democratic collectives? (Stuart)

7. Job changes & asset ownership. How does a model of workers collective ownership deal with job changes? Would this impede job mobility? (Patrizia)

8. Risk taking. Will the asset redistribution in the B&G model actually increase risk-taking among the poor? This seems problematic. (Cesar)

9. the insurance scheme. How would this really work? Wouldn’t it become a massive subsidy to big corporations? (Cesar)

10. Effects on inequality. Redistributing capital assets could actually increase inequality because of interactions with unequal social and cultural capital. (Cesar)

11. Embedding workers in capitalism. Doesn’t the B&G proposal just embed workers more deeply in capitalism? Is this desirable? Maybe more class conflict is preferable. (Adam)


13. The logic of the models of coordination failures. Is B&G justified in treating coordination failures as such an important, pervasive problem in capitalism? On what basis do they see this as the defining characteristic of the employer/employee relation? It seems like they derive their reasoning from a mathematical model rather than use the math to illustrate their concepts. (Matais) Isn’t the state’s capacity to solve CFs increasingly limited? (Chang)

14. Exploitation. Firm-level asset redistribution seems to solve the exploitation issue, but many of the critics seemed to prefer BI. This was surprising. (Richard)

15. Sources of Inequality. What is the relationship between inequalities generated in labor markets and in capital ownership? Why would redistribution of the latter impact on the former? (Eric)

16. Vouchers Will educational vouchers lead to increasing disparity between central city and suburban areas, since the market will work more effectively in the suburbs? (Linda)