



# An Economic Dream<sup>1</sup>

Erik Gustaf Geijer

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Once a rare occurrence, I have for some time now often dreamt. These dreams are not usually disjointed and fantastical. On the contrary, they are distinguished by a logical context, which unfolds, seemingly autonomously, behind the eyes of the dreamer. It is as if the machinery of the mind had of its own volition crafted the subject.

Recently, this was economic and left the, perhaps rare, example of an economic dream; therefore I wish to tell of it, briefly. It is a dream of national economy, which may be added to the others.

The question concerned the influence of the natural features of a country on its finances and the answering of it undertaken with respect to the fatherland.

In that connection it emerged that the expanse of Sweden, with all its natural dissimilarities, could not avoid exerting a profound influence on the economies of especial places in the fatherland. The different lives of the plainsman and the mountain-dweller were displayed. The miner, the farmer, the manufacturer, the merchant, the hunter, the fisherman stepped forward, all under the various conditions that the place and the distinct needs arising therefrom prescribed for their activities. They gathered into groups accordingly. The various groups were scattered, separated by great distances, in that way isolated within themselves. It is no wonder that each regarded itself as *a whole unto itself!* Different needs and circumstances had shaped each one. The force of habit had cemented it and erected a wall, as it were, around each domain, beyond whose horizon the gazes of the

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1. “En ekonomisk dröm” (“An Economic Dream”) was published in *Dagligt Allehanda* on February 26, 1847. Its author Erik Gustaf Geijer (pronounced “yay-yer”), then 64 years old, died less than two months later; “En ekonomisk dröm” was the last of his publications during his lifetime. The piece is translated into English for the first time by Peter C. Hogg, and appears in *Freedom in Sweden: Selected Works of Erik Gustaf Geijer*, edited by Björn Hasselgren (Stockholm: Timbro, 2017): 441–445. The text is used by permission of Björn Hasselgren.

inhabitants need not extend. I said to myself: behold the origins of *corporative and guild privileges!* — These are the children first of *need*, second of *habit* and finally of *prejudice*. As *such*, they exist long in the imagination, because their true validity has dissipated long before this. The various domains, by reason of an omniprevalent enterprise, are now drawn together. Their relationships to each other are utterly changed. He whose gaze encompasses several such areas will see this at once. He who lives by charity under the old conditions, however, does not see the change, or considers it a disorder and thus cries out incessantly for order, the *old* order, that is; even as the *new* is already, unnoticed by him, in full swing.

It is clear that he whose enterprise extends to *several* objects of human industry will more easily arrive at this insight, than he who is confined to one. For the insight is a *comparative* insight and arises through the comparison. So, it manifests itself soonest to the merchant, the manufacturer; latest, most reluctantly to the artisan, in whose life change usually comes before he notices it, much less has any inkling of its causes. Therein, he is like an animal startled out of its hibernation, which charges its enemy to its own destruction. Thereof the recently so common uprisings of workers against their masters. It is a blind impulse, made yet blinder and angrier of the unaccustomed light. And this usually turns out to the detriment of those who surrender themselves in that direction and rush headlong into new conditions, alien to them, which will soon take them further than they could have imagined. What has been the result of all these assemblies? *Improved working methods*, in which *science* replaces the shortage of *reduced manual power* many times over; further, as a consequence thereof, *reduced wages*, and yet—oddly enough—*increased production and consumption* to the extent that the *freer distribution* puts food in the hands of many more than under the old, barbaric order. It is the leap into the midst of the new order of things, to which each and every one must resign himself. — Often, certainly, a hazardous endeavour. The transition reaps many victims. All who live in such a transition period must then be prepared—happily if he does not have eyes only for his losses, but also for the manifold and vital sources of new enterprise that run to meet him. Because that which is happening in the world now is: the *liberation of labour*—a true incarnation of the so-often odious *principle of personality*, which is increasingly encroaching upon reality. Judgments vary according to point of view! This *liberty* is tantamount with *disorder*, a thousand voices shout. On the contrary, she is a new, self-evolving order; so do others comfort themselves, the more industrious, the wiser. That liberty, even if she brings disorder for a passing while, follows her own rules and develops from within, implanted in her by the Creator, her own *law*: that is the full faith of *liberalism* and it leads to salvation. What is a *conservatism* that rejects this gift of God? A holding on to the corruptible in its corruption, no less fruitless than perfectly and immeasurably absurd. This way of thinking may very well console itself with its own, higher

wisdom, incomprehensible to most. This wisdom shuns the rising light. To the degree this lowers itself from the heights to the vales, the faith of the many in the same is lost, as the sunbeam vanishes in the fog; and thus is the supremely unnatural alliance between the so-called *conservative* and *popular* interests severed, whose loathsome delusion is still, on both sides, the so often invoked support for the most ignorant superstition.

What is the *new order of things*? With each day, its *law* evolves more clearly; its *substance* is already so apparent that one can thereof judge its nature and the spirit of progress. This substance is the *day-by-day, constantly evolving, all-encompassing fellowship and interaction of human powers and needs*. This new, but actually ancient law of labour is that of *intelligence*, which works in expanding circles. From there comes the dependency, from there the interaction in all occupations, equally familiar and acknowledged, and which, to the extent of this increasingly ardent acknowledgment, communicates ever more directly with its own essence and from this new, greater powers emerge, day-by-day and without surcease. Therefore, every seeming defeat is a true victory for it. It needs hardly touch the earth to feel at home and rise again with renewed vigour.

One needs only to regard this immortal principle in detail in its effects to find oneself in the field of an infinite project that reaches in all directions and returns from all directions to its centre. — How could any occupation, any area of human enterprise, now be able to isolate itself? In so doing, it cuts itself off from its very breath of life, withers and inevitably dies. It thrives, flourishes, feels happy and promotes happiness utterly to the same extent that it both communicates and receives based on an enlivening influence.

And so, the separated groups of industries and trades finally flowed together before my eye. The artisan, not merely with his bodily strength, but with his intelligence, was the foundation of it all, for an enterprise that the factory owner used and distributed, that the merchant spread across the earth. I saw a new day ascend above it. It was the rising sun; and the Dancing Hours moving around the sun, in measured heavenly-harmonious orbits, were the beautiful performance at which I wakened from my dream.

## About the Author



**Erik Gustaf Geijer** (1783–1847) was an eminent figure in Sweden, a celebrated poet, a musician and composer, a moralist, an historian, a political philosopher, a public intellectual, and a Member of Parliament. He was professor at Uppsala University and its Chancellor. His work and thinking have defied classification, as he straddled, shifted between, or, arguably, integrated, enlightenment and romantic tendencies, nationalistic and liberal, scientific and poetic. Works in English translation by Peter C. Hogg are available in *Freedom in Sweden: Selected Works of Erik Gustaf Geijer*, edited by Björn Hasselgren (Stockholm: Timbro, 2017), which also contains an essay by Lars Magnusson on Geijer's life, works, and influence. In discussing influences on Geijer and the formation of his outlook, Magnusson brings to light British currents and especially Scottish moral philosophers and historians.

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