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Trends. Labor and Environmental Standards and Human Welfare: Global Prescriptions

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One very significant controversy on global trade concerns the issue of linking the fruits of so-called free trade to meeting specific labor and environmental standards. The idea is that noxious human consequences of such trade--e.g., labor exploitation and environmental damage--can be tempered if not reversed. Problems arise, however, in what these standards should comprise and how they should be introduced and effected.

To assume one set of specific set of global standards discounts countless combinations and permutations of values embraced by segments of the world population--some, perhaps, exemplifying false consciousness, others closer to Truth than global powerbrokers might think. To assume that standards directed through a deus ex machina process will effect changes for the betterment of human welfare may qualify as magical thinking--as may assertions that free or freer trade will inevitably foster labor and environmental benefits. When the reality of employing the quest to improve human welfare merely as a cover for maximizing bottom-line profits or furthering various political ideologies and personal advantages is added to these problems, one may well fear for the future human condition.

To try and guard against the red claw of economic nature is to be commended. However, in attempts to translate such intentions into congruent consequences, means may overwhelm ends. (See Bannerjee, S.B. (1998). Corporate environmentalism: Perspectives from organizational learning. *Management Learning*, 29, 147-164; Feldman, S., & Buechler, S. (1998). Negotiating difference: Constructing selves and others in a transnational apparel manufacturing firm. *Sociological Quarterly*, 39, 623-644; Friedman, T. (February 29, 2000). Eyes on the prize. *The New York Times*, p. A27; Langerak, F., et al. (1998). Exploratory results on the antecedents and consequences of green marketing. *Journal of the Market Research Society*, 40, 323-335; Uyeki, E.S., & Holland, L.J. (2000). Diffusion of pro-environmental attitudes? *American Behavioral Scientist*, 43, 646-662; Wolfe, A. (1997). The moral meaning of work. *Journal of Socio-Economics*, 26, 559-570.) (Keywords: Free Trade, Environmental Standards, Global Trade, Labor Standards.)