

Peer Review

Review of: "To Be or Not to Be (Human): A Question of Economic Theories"

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This manuscript, *"To Be or Not to Be (Human): A Question of Economic Theories,"* sets out an intriguing and ambitious project: to bring Latin American structuralist economics (especially CEPAL) into dialogue with Lou Andreas-Salomé's reflections on human incompleteness and chronic dissatisfaction, as a way of moving beyond the reductionist figure of *homo economicus*. The central claim is that socio-economic structures do not merely shape material inequality but also condition subjective experiences of lack and objectification, and that this relation, while marked by constraint, also contains creative and transformative potential. Conceptually, this is a promising and original direction, and the author demonstrates solid familiarity with key structuralist figures such as Furtado, Prebisch, and Myrdal, as well as with Salomé's literary and philosophical writings.

However, as it stands, the article reads more like a juxtaposition of two literatures than a fully integrated theoretical contribution. The first substantive section, on CEPAL structuralism, offers a competent and largely sympathetic overview of structural heterogeneity, dualism, land concentration, insertion into the international division of labor, and the limits of export-led growth. The second section, on Salomé, shifts to a very different discursive mode, moving through long quotations and biographical episodes (Rilke, Tolstoy, family relations, Bolshevism) to sketch her account of human incompleteness, idealization, and the desire for wholeness. The reader is told that these structural and existential dimensions are related, but the precise nature of the relationship is under-theorized. The conclusion that internal and external structures "influence one another in pursuit of the unattainable" is suggestive but not analytically sharpened.

Methodologically, the article claims to be based on a critical reading of structuralist economics and Salomé's texts, supported by NVivo coding of Salomé's work and expert-guided text selection. Yet the methods section does not provide sufficient detail to justify the use of qualitative data analysis software:

the corpus of texts is not clearly delimited, the coding scheme is not described, and there is no discussion of how coding informed the argument beyond standard close reading. As a result, the reference to NVivo risks functioning as a rhetorical marker of rigor rather than a genuine methodological scaffold. The paper would be more coherent either by embracing its identity as a conceptual essay and dropping the software language or by significantly strengthening the methodological exposition and showing how the coding generated specific analytic categories that are then systematically used in the comparison.

The manuscript's critique of mainstream economics and *homo economicus* is rhetorically powerful but somewhat conventional and, at times, overstated. "The economic mainstream" is treated as a static bloc centered on static equilibrium models and fully rational agents, with little acknowledgment of internal critiques (behavioral, institutional, feminist, post-Keynesian) or earlier efforts to bring subjectivity, desire, and social structures into economic analysis. Similarly, structuralism is presented almost entirely in expository terms, without engaging the substantial critical literature on CEPAL itself—its tendency to privilege the nation-state scale, its technocratic leanings, and its partial inattention to race, gender, and colonial power relations. Given the article's stated interest in objectification and the paradoxes of human wholeness, one might expect a more reflexive treatment of how structuralist categories themselves can objectify human beings as functional units within development schemes.

A major limitation, especially pronounced given the Latin American focus, is the near silence on race, coloniality, and embodied difference. The discussion of colonization, land distribution, and "servile labor" never fully thematizes the role of enslaved Africans, Afro-descendant populations, Indigenous dispossession, and racial hierarchies in shaping both socio-economic structures and subjective experiences of incompleteness and objectification. On the existential side, the discussion draws exclusively on European thinkers (Salomé, Sartre, Schopenhauer) to articulate "the human condition" that is then juxtaposed with the structural realities of the global periphery. This creates a conceptual asymmetry in which the subjective dimension is silently normed by European experience, while inequality and underdevelopment are assigned to non-European contexts. Even a brief acknowledgment of this limitation, or a gesture toward Black, Indigenous, or decolonial perspectives on desire, wholeness, and structural constraint, would substantially strengthen the manuscript.

Stylistically, the article leans heavily on long, vivid quotations from Salomé, often with minimal analytic unpacking. These passages are engaging in themselves, but sometimes obscure the main argumentative line and make it difficult to see precisely how each excerpt advances the central thesis about structure and dissatisfaction. A tighter selection of shorter quotations, followed by more explicit interpretation and

cross-referencing back to the economic discussion, would make the piece more accessible and persuasive. Similarly, the conclusion returns to evocative metaphors (e.g., the lunar eclipse and half-moon equilibrium) but does not clearly summarize what we now know about the relationship between socio-economic structures and subjective incompleteness that we did not know before.

In its current form, the manuscript is best read as an exploratory essay rather than a fully realized theoretical contribution. Its strengths lie in the unusual pairing of CEPAL structuralism and Salomé, the clear exposition of key structuralist ideas, and the intuitive sense that economic inequality and existential dissatisfaction are intertwined. To move toward publishable form, I would encourage the author to (1) clarify the central research question and specify which concepts are being used to bridge economics and existential reflection (e.g., structure, objectification, equilibrium, desire); (2) either significantly deepen or honestly simplify the methodological claims; (3) engage more explicitly with critiques of both mainstream economics and structuralism; (4) acknowledge and, where possible, address the Eurocentric and race-blind limitations of the current framing; and (5) reduce the reliance on extended quotation in favor of more sustained analysis.

With revision along these lines, the manuscript could make a distinctive contribution to interdisciplinary conversations about political economy, subjectivity, and the limits of *homo economicus*. As written, it has clear potential but requires substantial reworking to deliver on its ambitious conceptual promise.

Declarations

Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.