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7 K H 3 D U D E O H R I W K H

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The widely held belief that market competition allows for the highest quality and most preferred outcome to flourish, and thereby brings about optimal social arrangements, is a powerful view that has benefited modern society enormously. Nevertheless, a focus on the subtleties and

communities. One fundamental point that was regularly made was that townspeople in most of the towns were by no means rich, and if prices could be lowered, that would be a good thing.

It turns out that new innovations in production, distribution and transportation were emerging throughout the world, and the articulate advocates were seeing that they could bring goods to the people at lower prices,

boarded up, renovations stopped, and town centers began to decay. The townspeople were saddened but said little. Some who did speak up called it progress.

One place that was booming, however, was the outskirts of the towns where the Super Big-Marts and the Giant Home Warehouse stores were providing goods and services for all the people from so many different towns. Since there were no more town centers to speak of, someone suggested that a lot of duplication could be avoided if towns were eliminated altogether and instead a large county government could be formed.⁷ This was readily agreed to, and the first thing that the officials of the county government noticed was that with so many people going to the Super Big-Marts and the Giant Home Warehouses, the roads certainly needed to be widened. They organized the construction of four and six-lane roads throughout the county (which, if you recall, used to be a collection of towns). Of course, the purpose of the widening was to ease the traffic congestion getting to the Super Big-Marts and the Giant Home Warehouse stores. And since reduced shopping time was important, the speed limits on these new widened roads were set at 55 mph, but more typically cars moved at 60 to 7

GDP is measured by the dollar spending on economic activity. When people went for walks in their town centers, those walks sometimes occupied their entire evening. There could be at times as many as six or seven adults visiting and chatting together on the town benches. During that entire period, though people may have been enjoying themselves, no GDP was created. The same thing used to happen on weekends when teenagers went to the town center to meet their friends. Perhaps one or two would buy an ice cream, which would contribute toward GDP, but all the “hanging out” with friends did not count.

The Super Big-Marts and Giant Home Warehouse stores, on the other hand, were engines of measurable economic activity. The sole purpose of going there was to buy something. The franchise restaurants moved people in and out with clockwork efficiency. They enticed hungry customers with enormous portions that made up for a lack of quality, and the resulting obesity epidemic even helped finance a growing healthcare market. Even those few who individually tried to protect themselves from the obesity epidemic did so by joining large gyms, usually a short drive along the widened parkways from the franchise restaurants, the Super Big-Marts, and the Giant Home Warehouse stores. The gym memberships too were dollar-transactions that created GDP. By all accounts the county was booming! It was an engine of GDP!

The numbers did not lie, did they? The people must have been happy with such a high GDP or, should we say, such a high quality of life? Another set of numbers, however, suggested a less sanguine picture. Mental illness and depression were on the rise, as was suicide. A wise man wrote