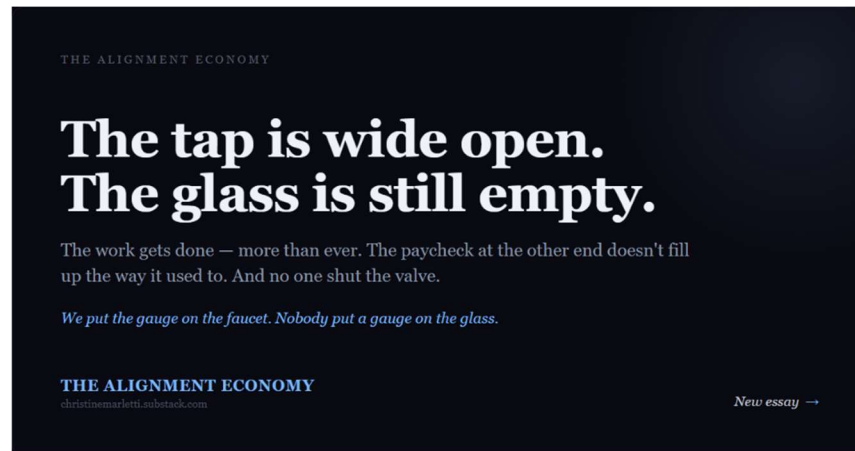


The Tap Is Wide Open. The Glass Is Still Empty.

We keep measuring the wrong end.



Picture a soaker hose. One of those flat, weepy hoses you snake through a flower bed so the whole row drinks a little at a time. Good tool. Does its job.

Now picture somebody trying to fill a drinking glass with it.

They turn the water on full. The faucet's wide open, all the way, nothing held back. They hold the glass under the end of the hose and they wait.



The glass stays empty.

Not because the water's off — it's running hard. Not because somebody snuck over and shut the valve. The water is going full blast. It's just leaving through a thousand little holes up and down the length of the hose, soaking the ground, the table, their shoes, everything in the bed. By the time the hose gets to the glass, there's nothing left to pour.

Here's the part worth sitting with. Nobody did anything wrong. The water's good. The faucet works fine. The person turned it all the way up. The hose isn't even broken — it's doing exactly what a soaker hose is built to do. It's just the wrong tool for filling a glass. So the water goes everywhere except where it was meant to go, and the person holding the glass comes up dry.

Hold onto that picture. We'll come back to it.

Ask a young mom what daycare costs. She'll tell you it's a second rent. Some months it's more than the first one.

Now ask the woman who works at that daycare what she takes home. She's barely above minimum wage. She loves those kids and she can't afford her own.

Sit with that for a second, because it doesn't add up the way you'd expect. The mom is paying too much. The worker is earning too little. And they are talking about the *same dollar*.

You'd think one of them was getting rich off the other. Neither one is. The mom isn't overpaying because the worker's greedy. The worker isn't underpaid because the mom's cheap. The money goes in one end big and comes out the other end small, and the difference disappears somewhere in the middle that neither of them can see.

Put those two women in the same room and they'd probably start out sore at each other. The mom thinking, “why is this so expensive.” The worker thinking, “why am I paid so little for work this hard.” Both of them right. Both of them pointing at the wrong person.

They're not on opposite sides. They're standing at the two ends of the same hose.

It's not just daycare. Once you see the shape, you start seeing it everywhere.

The work gets done. More of it, faster, better than ever — you'd have to shut your eyes to miss how much this country makes in a day. The water's on full. But the paycheck at the other end doesn't fill up the way it used to. People are working hard and standing still, and they can't quite say why, because nobody ever told them no. Nobody shut the valve in front of them. They just keep holding the glass under the tap and coming up dry.

And when you feel that — when you're doing everything right and the glass still won't fill — the natural thing is to look around for who's holding the valve. Some person. Some group. Somebody to be mad at. But most of the time there isn't one. There's just a hose that was never built to deliver to the spot where you're standing.

So, here's the question that's been bugging me. The one I can't shake.

How come everybody keeps saying things are great?

You hear it all the time. Record this. All-time high that. The numbers are strong, strongest they've ever been. And you're standing there with an empty glass thinking — “am I the crazy one?”

You're not. Here's how both things are true at once.

We put the gauge on the faucet.

Think about it. The way we measure whether things are working is to look at how much water is coming out of the tap. And by that measure, things are fantastic. Water everywhere. More than ever. The floor's soaked, the table's soaked, it's pouring out faster than it ever has in history. If your whole job is to watch the faucet, you are looking at the best numbers anyone's ever seen — and you are not lying. That water is real.

But nobody put a gauge on the glass.

Nobody's measuring the one thing that actually matters to the person holding it: “is it filling up?” We count the water that comes out. We don't count the water that lands where it was supposed to land. So we keep calling it a success — look how much is coming out! — while the person who needed a drink is still thirsty.

Both gauges are honest. They're just bolted to different ends of the same hose.

Stand by the faucet and it's a triumph. Water everywhere, more than ever, a new record every year.

Stand where the glass is, and you're bone dry — ankle-deep in a puddle, being told how lucky you are to be this wet.

I don't think this is anybody's fault, exactly. The hose isn't evil. The folks watching the faucet aren't fools — they're reading a real gauge, it's just pointed at the wrong end. That's what makes me think this is a design problem more than a people problem. And design problems have design answers, which is more hopeful than it sounds, because it means nobody has to be the bad guy for it to get fixed. You don't have to hate anyone. You just have to pick a better tool, and point the gauge at the thing you actually care about.

But you can't fix what you don't measure. And right now, just about the only thing we measure is whether the water's on.

So, I keep landing back on the same question, and I'll leave you with it, because I don't think we ask it near enough:

What would it take to put the gauge on the glass?

Note 1 — the story, delivered whole (*attach an image: a drinking glass held under a soaker hose, or a soaker hose running full*)

Picture trying to fill a drinking glass with a soaker hose — one of those flat ones that weep water all along a flower bed.

You turn the tap on full. Water's roaring. And the glass stays empty.

Not because the water's off. Because it's leaking out a thousand little holes along the hose — soaking the ground, the table, your shoes — and by the time it reaches the glass, there's nothing left to pour.

Nobody shut the valve. The water's good. The faucet works. The hose isn't even broken. It's just the wrong tool for the job.

That's the part I can't stop turning over. You can do everything right — crank it all the way up — and still come up dry, and there's nobody to be mad at. Just the wrong tool in the middle.

I think a lot of things work like that right now.

Note 2 — the sharpest line, stripped bare (*this is your restack bait — pull the puddle line out clean*)

Stand by the faucet and it's a triumph — water everywhere, more than ever, a record every year.

Stand where the glass is, and you're bone dry. Ankle-deep in a puddle, being told how lucky you are to be this wet.

Both people are looking at something real. They're just standing at different ends of the same hose.

Note 3 — the open question (*invites quote-restacks where people add their own answer — that's how you ride into other feeds*)

We measure whether the water's coming out of the tap. We almost never measure whether the glass actually filled.

So the faucet reads "record high" while the person holding the glass is still thirsty — and both numbers are honest. They're just counting different ends.

Here's my question: where in your life is the tap wide open and the glass still empty? What's the thing that's supposedly never been better and somehow still doesn't reach you?