

Toward Living Right on the Earth

by Ruth Caplan

Right Relationship: Building a Whole Earth Economy by Peter G. Brown and Geoffrey Garver takes us from the local to the global by asking what kinds of international institutions are needed to move from our current “economic growth equals prosperity” model, which is leading to an “ecological holocaust,” to one that promotes and supports a life-centered, socially-just global economy. Grounded in the Quaker concept of sufficiency, the book has been widely praised around the world, including by the former Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme and, perhaps most surprisingly, by the Chief of the Environment Division for the Inter-American Development Bank.

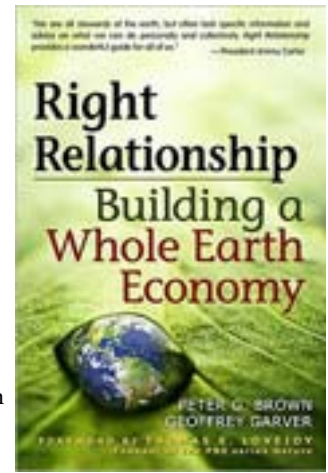
The authors start by defining terms:

- Right relationship is summed-up by quoting Aldo Leopold, “A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability and beauty of the biotic community.”
- Economic efficiency (the allocation of resources to their highest valued use and the production and distribution of goods and services at the lowest possible cost), which ignores ecological costs, is replaced by “earth efficiency,” which measures how “the entire global community of life functions.”
- Wealth is redefined from money to “a share of the earth’s life” and the creative force of sunlight, which provides the energy to counter entropy.
- Cost of an item is the amount that “integrity, resilience, and beauty of the earth’s life-support systems must be exchanged to get it.”
- Money is “a license to exert an ecological cost by using up complexity or producing wastes and toxins.”
- And finally, waste is “the inability to do any more work to maintain self-organizational capacity.”

Greater equality is seen as “a cornerstone of social cohesion” and so “right relationship requires urgent and massive redistribution” through global taxation.

Using these principles, the authors then propose four global institutions for a whole earth economy.

- *The Global Reserve* undertakes monitoring and analysis of information on the ecological limits of the earth in order to keep the economy within those limits. International trade uses an exchange currency, ecors, which would be a system of credits and debits “tied to a nation’s management (or mis-management) of its ecological capacity.”
- *Trusteeships of Earth’s Commons* to protect the global commons in a fair way, is modeled after Peter



Barnes’ sky trust idea where “each person is legally defined as a co-owner of a common property resource.”

This could be set up as a global trust

or a series of national trusts. The problem here is that this unfortunately implies property rights to nature, which is counter to the concept that nature itself has fundamental and inalienable rights.

- *The Global Federation* is a “means of passing enforceable rules and regulations” relating to “global security and the protection of human rights and life’s commonwealth.” This institution would also have taxation authority with the goal of preventing abuse of the commons.
- *A Global Court* to provide “an independent judicial review of the performance of these institutions and compliance with global rules.” The court would have the power to prosecute “civil and criminal offenses that are ‘harmful to natural systems’.”

Their recommendations for nonviolent reform include, “Withdraw from the present system and highlight its illegitimacy.” Starting with reference to England’s anti-slavery campaigners, Ghandi’s salt march, and Martin Luther King Jr., they move on to the present context, by suggesting that “withdrawal of support for the corporate food system” is an example of present day non-violent resistance. We would add that the movement for time dollars and local currencies to support local economies can also be seen as non-violent resistance.

One need not agree with every recommendation to appreciate their effort to re-conceptualize the global in light of the present economic and ecological crisis. There is much food for thought to feed local discussion groups.

Professor Peter G. Brown was the first full-time Director of the McGill School of Environment. He has taught and consulted around the world on public policy and the environment.

Geoffrey Garver is an environmental consultant and lecturer in law in Montreal. He has watchdogged NAFTA’s compliance with environmental regulations and worked for the US Justice Department and EPA.

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