Stolen from future generations?

The need to move to a political economy of generosity

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Abstract

During the last 20 years, Aotearoa New Zealand has been an ideological battleground for the hearts and minds of citizens. As part of the outcome, we have been taught to behave as autonomous, self-interested, utility-maximising individuals, in a culture based on individual property rights where stealing of property is illegal. While this has been going on, a great deal of value has in effect been stolen from the commons (or common wealth, as earlier generations knew it), and put into private ownership.

Issues such as these are addressed in this presentation, in order to underpin the proposal that a political economy of generosity is needed to go beyond the present political economy of self-interest. This is especially necessary if we are to replenish the environmental, social and economic commons, which have been depleted beyond what is necessary for a long-term peaceful, just and sustainable society for future generations.

Development based on Te Tiriti o Waitangi has also suffered from the present political economy.

In addressing these issues, we propose that particular emphasis be given to examining what is in effect the sanction of exclusion from a community of discourse, where the language of the ruling hegemony makes transformation of the current community very difficult. Acts of kindness/generosity are key elements of a process in which participants are invited to stay in that community and engage in communicative interchange. The methodology of subsidiarity is central to achieving clarity of relationships, especially those that exist between local, national and global communities.

Third sector relationships with the public (government), private (commercial) and household sectors, as well as with whanau/hapu/iwi will also need clarification, especially the interface between community development and community (market) economic development.

The Politics of Economics and the Economics of Politics

The essentially economic nature of orthodox political theories is made clear by C.B. Macpherson [1]:

Political society consists of relations of exchange between proprietors. Political society becomes a calculated device for the protection of this property and for the maintenance of an orderly relation of exchange.

Further, the legal economist Richard Dawson [1] has pointed out that orthodox economics proceeds upon a number of assumptions:

- The world is populated by a number of discrete human actors, each of whom is rational and motivated solely by self-interest.
- The social world is conceived of as a set of actors of equal competence, without race, gender, age, or culture.
- External to the actors is a natural world that provides what are called resources, which are acted upon by actors to create something called wealth.

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- The central activity of the actors is exchange -- a process by which one actor exchanges some item within his [sic] dominion for an item within the dominion of another, or, far more commonly, for money which is the medium of exchange.
- · The central principle of the system is that everything is at least hypothetically interchangeable.
- Each actor is assumed to be motivated by an unlimited desire to acquire or consume.
- Since each is only interested in their own welfare, each is in structural competition with all the others.
- Exchange is the method of determining value, which, tautologically, is said to be the price for which items are sold.
- In the world of economics individual actors function according to what economists call rationality. This is a reasoning process that consists of identifying items of potential consumption or dominion in the world, and calculating their value in dollar or other common terms. The outcome, it is said, at least under certain conditions -- is global efficiency and maximum satisfaction.

US economist Lester Thurow adds to Dawson's critique with the following [1]:

No other discipline attempts to make the world act as it thinks the world should act. But of course what Homo sapiens does and what Homo economicus should do are often quite different. That, however, does not make the basic model wrong, as it would in every other discipline. It just means that actions must be taken to bend Homo sapiens into conformity with Homo Economicus. So, instead of adjusting theory to reality, reality is adjusted to theory.

Similar comments are made by the critic Bruce Jesson, in his incisive analysis of economic policies in Aotearoa New Zealand [1]. Adherence to a political creed based on the idea of the "rationality of the market" has dominated NZ politics since 1984, and as examples of the results, Jesson concludes that "Speculative finance has gutted New Zealand's productive economy and society as a whole has been gutted with it" [1].

It is because of these and related outcomes of the so-called "New Zealand Experiment" [1] that we wish to examine the question of what has been "stolen from future generations".

Alternative Approaches

In examining this question we first draw attention to work by economists that goes beyond the position of orthodox economic theory. Dawson [1] quotes the political economist Joan Robinson, who once said, "It is the task of the economist to . . . justify the ways of Mammon to man." Dawson comments:

Unlike Robinson, few economists appear to question whether or not the logic of rationality and self interest leads not to human satisfaction but the loss of humanity itself. Where is our capacity to love, give and be generous? Can a community function and exist without these sentiments? The answer is, perhaps by definition, no. So where might an economics of generosity begin?

The economist Clive Hamilton has some suggestions in this context [1]:

Some people accuse the conservation movement of campaigning with quasi-religious fervour. But if religion means a return to the deepest spiritual and moral values, a reconnection between ourselves and our source in the natural world, is that not a cause for celebration? Are not the gravest ills of our society, and the gravest ills of ourselves, due to the selfishness, the greed, the alienation and the ingratitude that grow directly from the separation of our daily lives from our true natures? I am not suggesting that we replace science and economics with religion. I am arguing that we need to be chemists and alchemists, economists and moral philosophers, rational thinkers and numinous believers. In other words, we need to transcend duality and become whole.

It is at this point that we propose a synthesis that attempts to answer the question in our title. Because of the dominance of economics in the current political economy, we begin with the need to expose the limitations of current orthodox economics (see above). Our synthesis also starts with a framework for a new economics. We find it in the relatively recent movement to develop an Ecological

Economics whose primary concern is that of sustainability [1] and sustainable development (SD). Such a whole-system economics [1] concentrates on the implications for sustainability of the totality of human activities on a global scale. This form of economics takes the following concerns into account [1]:

- the generally discontinuous behaviour of complex real-world economic, social and economic systems (i.e. systemic non-linearity);
- far-from-equilibrium thermodynamics, giving rise to evolutionary indeterminacy;
- concern about the widely-held belief that the economy can continue to grow indefinitely within a non-growing ecosphere;
- the potentially catastrophic and irreversible trends that are currently observable in global lifesupport systems;
- the destabilising effects of today's social and inter-generational inequities;
- the distorting effects of wealth and power on public and international policy, affecting all of the above.

Most of these concerns cannot be adequately understood through monetary analysis - they also require institutional and political-economic frameworks and/or biophysical approaches.

Triple Bottom Line Reporting

As one response, Triple Bottom Line (TBL) reporting has been introduced in recent years. Its origins are highly commendable, in that it aims to address issues such as:

- · The need for radical changes in our relationship with the earth (environmental)
- · Much greater justice for the poor of the world (social)
- · Transformation of our economic systems (economic).

It is an exciting and daunting challenge - and one which most TBL reports fail to come to grips with. We note here that Te Runanga o Ngai Tahu has introduced the Quadruple Bottom Line by adding cultural considerations [1].

In practice, the economic - or more commonly the financial - bottom line is obtained by methods that are authorised by the Society of Accountants, and are subject to audit. Social Auditing has been introduced to bring in the social dimension, and Environmental Impact Assessment for the environment. To be blunt, however, as Gray and Milne point out [1]:

Thus the triple bottom line is not a triple bottom line at all but a financial bottom line with a little bit of social and environmental added". While TBL "... is a nice-sounding phrase that encourages us to start thinking about organisations as more than economic entities and potentially focuses attention on good quality social and environmental reporting ... there is an essential conflict between financial and other bottom lines which, for the foreseeable future at least, the financial will always win.

To give one example, when Shell Oil published their first TBL report, the associated text acknowledged that:

When others talk about the three pillars of sustainable development, they sometimes ignore or overlook the fundamental economic factors which are so central to human progress. For us, wealth creation and economic prosperity remain at the heart of all that we do.

That comment fits neatly with one in a March 1994 discussion paper from the NZ Government, in the following statement on Climate Change policy:

The Government has already determined that it will only take steps on climate change measures that are consistent with continued economic growth and will not reduce New Zealand's international competitive advantage. (Emphasis as in the original)

Unlike TBL, the emerging field of ecological economics has the potential to provide a holistic

framework for sustainable development, via Systems approaches. A shift to a political economy of generosity does not mean that we lose the ability to do sound economic planning; it implies however, that economics is seen clearly as a tool, not a blueprint for social development, as has been the case during the political economy of self-interest of the last 17 years..

Towards a Change in Social Relationships

In asserting the need to move from simplistic, market/monetary-based models of development, we see the need to move away from prescribing social relationships within the terms of the orthodox economic model. Our goal is a community ethics-based system based upon individual and collective criteria, which first identifies and names the key issues at stake and then puts in place, wherever possible, community-initiated means to determine how these issues should be resolved [1].

Our approach is, therefore, unashamedly ethical and normative as well as scientific, and we assert that hermeneutics and narrative approaches are no less valid than science or economics. We are aware that this will require not only inter-disciplinary conversations, where questions from all current disciplines are addressed, but also trans-disciplinary developments which, while having their origins in former disciplines, respond to new questions and create new frameworks for thinking.

The issue of satisfying human needs and addressing poverty is a key element of a new democracy which could develop a political economy of generosity. Simple fiscal solutions to the problem of poverty or poverties are seldom adequate to address the complexity of real situations [1]. Satisfiers of poverties need to be identified via procedures that are guided by ethical principles clarified through community processes within an identified framework. Without such a Systems approach, society will remain hooked into perpetually searching for the political-economic "magic bullet" to ensure poverty alleviation, and will not find ways to work on new responses.

In summary, then, it is only when policy development is guided by a clear goal and firm ethical principles that it can go beyond narrow economic theory or simple political expediency. It is only when policy development is resourced by an understanding of the interdependence of all parts of the total system of people, society, economy, and environment that sustainable outcomes will be achievable. This requires a move from the political economy of self-interest to the political economy of generosity, where there is understanding of the meaning of "enough".

From Here to There

One of the key steps in moving forward from the current political economy is for the Third Sector, alongside whanau/hapu/iwi, to have a high profile [1]. While reference to the voluntary sector as the "third" sector is inaccurate (at least historically), as it is really the "first" (having been there before either government or business), naming the sector as "third" highlights the essential role of the voluntary sector. It emerges in response to the power of the statutory (Government) and commercial (Business) sectors. It is the place where creativity and justice can emerge and is thus critical to understanding ways to the future.

Incorporating volunteering in policy development has the potential to bring visibility to those things that have made invisible by the previous approaches to social planning [1]:

There is more at stake in the volunteering experience than a sense of delivering and receiving fair treatment from strangers. Rather, what counts here is the capacity for compassion, kindness and caring. In bringing these human qualities into the public domain, volunteers are developing new ways to relate to strangers. By expanding our understanding of civility to include caring for 'generalised others', volunteering shows democracy's human face.

Because the Third sector has the potential to promote an alternative framework it is vital that it is not forced or encouraged (often under implicit or explicit threat of exclusion from funding opportunities) to be limited to the market model, where measuring, counting and contracting are the focus of reporting. Under such circumstances it is then implicitly defined - in economic terms - as a Service, rather than as what it has the potential to be, namely the creative edge that defines injustice and inequity in response to present-day reality. In any situation where the rules of the Government and the commercial sector are inextricably reduced to a market framework, social relationships and Treaty development alike are reduced as far as possible to fit within that framework.

We believe it is urgent for action to be taken to address the ongoing commodification and imposition of market approaches to social planning - even though they may be green-washed or otherwise disguised, albeit with good intentions. If deliberate planning to reverse the loss of the commons is not introduced, future generations will be unable to meet their hopes and aspirations.

Towards a Political Economy of Generosity

As an example of what "there" might look like, we envisage the state of restoration and replenishment of the Commons [1]. In this context, we mean Commons to mean not only the physical commons, but also the social, the cultural and the economic.

Our starting point for this move is the recognition that our systems are dominated by monocultural and monolingual processes. In Aotearoa New Zealand we believe the shift needs to be within the framework of *Te Tiriti o Waitangi* (the Treaty of Waitangi - Maori text). Our commitment is to work in solidarity with the indigenous Maori peoples (*tangata whenua*) as they collectively retain and regain their self-determination (*tino rangatiratanga*). As non-Maori (*tauiwi*) ourselves, we see it to be appropriate to work for an honourable Governance (*Kawanatanga*) in this land as a contribution towards a just, peaceful and sustainable world.

A five-step process is proposed, for those who are not Maori:

- Seeing the Treaty-based approach as a whole
- Planning the process by which society can move from a concentration on individual rights to one based on community ethics
- · Identifying and building on existing strengths and assets
- Organising production and distribution of goods and services (i.e. activity in the economy) in a
 way that does not conflict with these goals, while at the same time identifying and accounting for
 "bads and disservices" in the process
- Mapping the connections between parts of the whole, and celebrating! [1]

While this process is, naturally, focussed on Aotearoa New Zealand, the 1994 Draft UN Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples suggests a similar approach may be appropriate in other lands.

What follows are some suggestions for indicators of the state of restoration of the Commons.

Rangatiratanga

The first suggestion of an indicator is the level of understanding of the importance of *tangata whenua* regaining and retaining *tino rangatiratanga*.

The status and rights asserted in the *Declaration of Independence He Wakaputanga o Te Rangatiratanga o Nu Tireni* were guaranteed protection in te Tiriti o Waitangi [1]. This will require examination of the history of Aotearoa New Zealand. Published histories are only now rediscovering the truth [1].

It may be useful to note here the reservations of Rewa, principal chief of Kororareka, as long ago as the occasion of the signing of te Tiriti o Waitangi on 6th February 1840 [1]:

Chase away this white chief; what has he come to do here? To take away the freedom which you now enjoy. Do not believe in his words, do you not see that henceforth you will be mere slaves? That soon he will be employing you to make roads and break stones on the highways?

It has been pointed out by Gray (*Upoko Runaka, Te Runaka ki Otautahi o Kai Tahu*) [1], that in a context where *kaupapa Maori* is observed, voluntary activity [third sector] fits into the Maori world as an expression of the Maori philosophical cornerstones of collective consciousness, of collective well-being, and of collective responsibility, as espoused in the overarching philosophies of the people. Gray explains the philosophy through the maxim *Aroha ki te takata a rohe* - love and goodwill towards all people. This in turn is integral to the concept of *rangatiratanga*, or leadership; "... being energised by the divine spark, to be liberated as a means towards achieving absolute freedom.", which in turn is

"... a state of fulfilment of being."

In a recent seminar, Tuwhakairiora Williams [1] stated: "A leap of faith and high levels of trust will be required to make the difference needed, in the quest by whanau hapu iwi Maori, for well-being."

In his critical analysis framework underpinning Maori social wellbeing in supervision and placements, Leland A Ruwhiu [1] identified 5 key goals to support the development of Maori wellbeing. These included the promotion of generosity, which he described as "Being aware that when you gather together all can benefit from the processes, thinking and experiences"

In another presentation [1] of the essence of *Kaupapa Maori*, Mark Solomon (*Kaiwhakahaere, Te Runanga o Ngai Tahu TRONT*), described the six overarching values that govern their work. They are listed in the TRONT Annual Report [1] as:

- · Whanaukataka family
- · Manaakitaka looking after our people
- · Tohukataka expertise
- · Kaitiakitaka stewardship
- · Kaikokiri manutioriori warriorship, or having passion

If the road blocks in the way of *tangata whenua* regaining and retaining *Tino Rangatiratanga* are to be removed, *Tauiwi* must address issues of power and control in relation to the current limitation to the market framework. *Both tino rangatiratanga* (the superlative form of *rangatiratanga*) and community-based ethics are inherently collective in nature and must not be reduced to individual, self-interested utility-maximising behaviour, via establishment of property rights (including over what was previously the commons, or common wealth). The current dominant framework requires *tangata whenua* to address conflicts of interest involving issues of resources and society with tools that involve legal and/or economic processes which are inherently inimical to their view of those issues.

Attention to the limitations of the market framework, along with ensuring a higher profile for the Third Sector, will assist the development of community-based ethics and sustainable living - a political economy of generosity. We will need to examine matters of public trust, stewardship, common good, and the preservation of the things we hold dear or precious and cease relying on obtaining power through competition for property rights. Arbitration of disputes must become much more than the vesting of control over resources held in private hands. In particular, relationships between organisations at local, regional, national and international levels will need to begin with active relationship between the people in those organisations and their local *mana whenua* group(s) [1].

Subsidiarity

Our second suggestion for developing indicators of replenishment of the Commons is to highlight the importance of Subsidiarity [1] [1]. We believe this has the potential to bring order out of the apparent chaos that may be inferred from our proposals.

Subsidiarity requires that the group affected by a decision is, as far as possible, the group which makes the decision. It also embraces the understanding that there are different sites for different aspects of decisions, e.g. local groups make certain decisions, regional or interest groups make others, national and international groupings, as appropriate, make others.

This commitment to "no bigger than necessary" needs to be juxtaposed against a no less strong counter-principle, that wherever the welfare of a community requires concerted common action, the unity of that common action must be assured. Thus, "no bigger than necessary" has as its corollary, "as big as needed to achieve the common good." This body of thought on subsidiarity argues that the State should act in ways that utilise and favour, rather than simply supplant, voluntary associations.

Subsidiarity requires respect for local relationships as the basis of decision-making. The fact that te Tiriti o Waitangi was signed with hapu is compelling evidence for Tiriti-based development to be driven by subsidiarity.

Gifting

A third suggestion to indicate whether or not the Commons is being restored, is to affirm Gifting.

This requires addressing the reductionism which encourages humans to think of themselves as items of production, consumption and exchange (i.e. commodities) [1]. In this land we are fortunate that *tangata whenua* have never lost the full meaning of such gift relationships (*koha*).

Gifting is distinct from informal exchange relationships; it has no immediate or direct expectation of monetary reward or equivalent *quid pro quo*. In promoting the need to consider gifting, however, we do not at the same time assume that an individualist approach is valid. In collective gift relationships, care must be taken to ensure the autonomy of the gift-giver is enhanced.

Essential to this is to be advocates, as was Plato, of "free will" rather than the limited "free choice". Here, we argue [1] that the human will, unlike inanimate things, can initiate its own activity. We will need to be aware that modern psychology has provided a new area of discussion about free will, as it has introduced a new source of determinism, the unconscious. This new source still faces the problems that have always accompanied discussions of free will, the possibility of human improvement, and the question of personal responsibility.

Exploitation must be avoided. This experience of giving and receiving is fundamental to the building of community, where the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. The gift response may well enable the reframing of those assumptions about individualist behaviour which lie behind the market framework approach to social planning.

While no-one knows where the affirmation of gifting would lead, we believe it would enhance a political economy of generosity and it would at the very least be better than the current imposition of an ideology which fails to reflect the full range of human experience and wisdom.

Language

Our final suggestion for determining the state of the Commons is to focus attention on the place of language in determining who gets what in society.

Language, which is socially constructed, is the medium through which we constitute the social world. In this view of language, the single language called for by economists can be seen as a form of cultural imperialism, amounting to a call to extinguish those communities not able or willing to participate. The way in which language is used to make or break communities needs to be made transparent. Dawson [1] provides a useful example of this in his examination of the history of te Tiriti o Waitangi in the context of language.

Another example is how language can be used to ensure that everyone's contribution to society is recognised and valued. This will require acknowledgement that the current "employment" society does not do this and that the idea that employment as a fair way to distribute income is profoundly flawed [1]. As Hon Ruth Dyson pointed out in a recent address" [1]:

There are roughly 3.8 million people living in New Zealand. About 1.75 million of us are in paid jobs. A further 120,000 are actively looking for a job. This leaves around one million working age people who are not in paid employment or actively seeking paid employment. They may be doing voluntary work, domestic labour, caring for children, the sick and older people, or engaged in training or education. To leave these people out of the definition of 'work' would be to ignore their contribution to our economy and communities, as well as their needs and rights.

The recognition of voluntary work as *work done of one's own free will, unpaid and for the common good Aroha Ki Te Takata A Rohe* introduces responsibility and obligation and goes beyond the limitation to the simplistic ideology of free choice. This was aptly summarised by a 94 year old's poem [1]:

When someone raises voices of dissent
Against those things that violate her creed
The sound is drowned

Conclusions

Voluntary associations in the Third Sector have a key role in the shift from a political economy of self interest to one of generosity. This shift is, we suggest, urgent if there is to be a halt in the loss of that which we hold in Common. Finding ways to recognise and resource behaviour that is no longer based on the assumptions of the market approach to social planning are vital to prevent further loss. Ecological economics is critical to sound use of the market, as we move to a political economy of generosity.

The political economy of generosity, underpinned by transdisciplinary insights including those from ecological economics, is a far cry from the political economy of self-interest, which has been underpinned by the assumption that human beings act only in their own self-interest, expressing their independent individual preferences in such a way that the market responds to this demand. To move on from the fiction that the market will respond to such demands requires understanding that the market only responds to *funded* demand, not to unfunded demand.

In order to enhance the possibilities of a shift to a political economy of generosity, we have suggested indicators of restoration and replenishment of the Commons. These need urgent consideration if future generations are to be able to work together for the common good and not be limited to the individualistic pursuit of personal gain [1].

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