

virtue-oriented approach favours a position of selective endorsement regarding GM crops'. While eschewing a universalised pro or con attitude, he nonetheless holds to the cautious view that any example of the use of GM technology must be able to prove itself both beneficial to humans and at least not ecologically harmful. Only then can it be described as hitting 'the target of virtues of sustainability and stewardship', which will in turn earn it endorsement as the ethically correct choice in the particular circumstances of cultivation being considered. Sandler attends closely to one case that he thinks meets the necessary criteria, discussing the environmental effects and advantages for human health of golden rice, a vitamin A-loaded crop now being tested out in the Philippines and to be 'freely distributed [out of compassion] to the neediest'. He is quite clear that such crops can be grown in ways that do not 'miss the target of other virtues', and that these virtue targets trump any profit objectives of transnational corporations. Furthermore, Sandler opposes any overall tendency 'to rely primarily on further manipulation and domination, in the form of technological solutions, for addressing our agricultural and environmental challenges'.

The argument of this book is very condensed, but clearly laid out. *Character and Environment* is a challenging, original, worthwhile addition to the environmental ethics literature that is bound to pique curiosity and stimulate controversy.

MICHAEL ALLEN FOX

School of Humanities

University of New England

Armidale, NSW 2351, Australia

Deep Economy: The Wealth of Communities and the Durable Future

Bill McKibben

New York: Times Books/Henry Holt and Company, LLC, 2007

ISBN 978-0-8050-7626-4 (HB) \$25.00. 261pp.

The balance of evidence suggests that the earth is, as Professor Jeffrey Sachs's titled his 2007 Reith Lectures, 'bursting at the seams'. Climate change, water scarcity, AIDS, poverty, deforestation and other global epidemics seem to support that description. Something else that is becoming more evident is the inter-connectedness among these most pressing problems. To some, the blame lay in an increasingly globalised and growing economy. To others, a growing and global economy is the one chance of redemption.

Albert Einstein is alleged to have said something along the lines of 'We can't solve problems using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them.' Author Bill McKibben must have found inspiration in this sentiment when he

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started out on *Deep Economy: The Wealth of Communities and the Durable Future*. His basic premise is that our current economic paradigm – a growth system focused solely on efficiency – is deeply flawed. In a world where we are continually consolidating our food supplies, energy distribution systems, communication networks and economic production processes, it gets harder to believe that our current course is actually a solution.

From the author who first made the issue of climate change accessible to the general public in *The End of Nature* (1989) comes a new story, one not about problems but about solutions, and one encompassing solution in particular – community. While Nobel laureate Joseph Stiglitz pointed to the specifics of this flawed model in his book *Globalization and Its Discontents* (2002), McKibben's treatment is more wide-ranging and yet intentionally more shallow. The argument he is making – the value of community in restoring balance to the inequalities and destructive forces of globalisation – rightly presumes that the current paradigm is deleterious to local communities as a focus on the global takes away from the local.

In the first chapter, 'After Growth', McKibben fleshes out three arguments of why the growth obsession is flawed. (1) In many cases, growth leads to extreme inequality. Here is a particularly scary piece of evidence – the real wage for 90 per cent of US citizens was higher in 1979 than today. In other words, Americans were better off 28 years ago despite continual GDP increases. (This is the kind of statistic that leads to revolutions in other parts of the world.) (2) The Earth cannot sustain US-type consumption in a biophysically limited world. From climate change and soil erosion to energy shortages, the fact is that we cannot continue our consumption patterns for much longer, and certainly not at a Western rate for the entire world. (3) After a certain fairly low level of income, additional growth does not lead to any real changes in life satisfaction. For example, surveys show that the number of Americans who consider themselves 'very happy' peaked in the 1950s, despite a more than fivefold increase in GDP since then (Layard 2005, Kahnemann et al. 2006).

These ills are a result of an economic model that gives us cheap, fast and easy solutions (often at the expense of community) and they set the backdrop for McKibben's story, which is an examination of the consequences of factory farming, large scale manufacturing and the agglomeration of resources and control by multinationals. The model of growth he condemns provides us with ever smaller and cheaper convenience technology at the cost of community and productive food-producing and ecosystem-service-providing landscapes. To this McKibben says, 'It's nice to have microelectronics, it's necessary to have lunch.'

The book is extensively referenced, but that does not get in the way of what McKibben does best – tell a story – in this case, a story about solutions rooted in strong local communities. McKibben takes us to meet an organic farmer/state congressman in Vermont, through the urban food production of Havana, across

factory towns in China, into the hills of Nepal for micro-hydro projects, and gives us a peek into a cooperative seed bank in Bangladesh.

One of McKibben's major foils is food. He weaves the web of how we produce, distribute and integrate food into our lives and bodies. He makes the case that a more localised food production system has many advantages to the current paradigm of global food: it reduces our carbon footprint, enforces responsible land stewardship practices, and most importantly, fosters community bonds. The author then puts his money where his mouth is and spends a winter eating only food that was produced in his home Champlain Valley, Vermont. The biggest reward, he claims, was that each meal came with a story. From a wheat farmer down the road and a local apple orchard to the CSA (community supported agriculture) farm with dairy cows across the lake, McKibben discovered the simple pleasure of purchasing his neighbours' food. Compare this notion to the average American meal, which travels 1500 miles to reach the dinner plate.

Other community-based solutions McKibben unveils include local currencies, locally owned and managed forests, and community radio stations. He shows us how a few dedicated individuals began to 'grow' community in several different ways, such as a local library in the slums of Kabul, small-scale hydro power projects in Tibet, and micro-credit schemes in Bangladesh.

By the end of the book, McKibben has us convinced that the most important thing society can invest in to mitigate the coming effects of climate change, energy shortages and water scarcity is not solar panels, wind turbines or bio-fuels, but rather, community. McKibben takes the idea of social capital beyond an academic investigation and gives it breath and heart. He shows us that a move away from our current 'growth at all cost' path is not only ecologically necessary, but it is also socially desirable. On top of that, McKibben shows that through community, it is possible.

BRENDAN FISHER

Centre for Social and Economic Research on the Global Environment
School of Environmental Sciences
University of East Anglia, Norwich, UK NR4 7TJ

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