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Endangered Values and the Global Economy

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I

Economic violence, and violence in general, is a difficult topic to consider in depth. One cannot enumerate the horrors perpetuated by greed, fear, hatred, and outright competition to survive without feeling sick at heart and discouraged about the human condition. John Cobb has bravely made such an effort to assist our conversation, noting himself how serious these matters are. Right in the midst of oft-touted economic success—stock market booming, internet exploding, millionaires abounding—lies tremendous economic disparity and injustice. What the press reports is only half the story. Such success rides on the backs of many laborers and ravaged ecosystems. It does not come free of cost.

Buddhist perspectives on violence may be helpful in demonstrating just how serious a matter this is. Buddhist philosophy takes as a given that powerful passions are core to human nature. Spiritual development involves the taming of such distracting passions as lust, fear, sloth, doubt, hatred, and greed through the establishment of equanimity and a stable mind. Rather than ban these human tendencies as “sins”, Buddhist teachers urge intimate examination of such passions to understand completely the nature of their arising. Thus, the study of emotions or passions is central to Buddhist practice.

In many teachings, the passions are framed as the “Three Poisons”: greed, hatred, and delusion (or ignorance). It is thought that all forms of extreme distraction pulling one away from the path to enlightenment can be subsumed under these three. Buddhist psychology describes the emotions as being rooted in attraction, aversion, and neutrality. For example, one responds to another person by either a) wanting to have more (time together, depth of experience, physical contact, etc.) or b) wanting *not* to have more contact, in fact, wanting less, or c) not really caring one way or the other. These choices are repeated with situations, places, plants and animals. A person’s collection of preferences (likes and dislikes) might be described as their personality. From a Buddhist perspective, these preferences represent a person’s self-centered ego, an obstacle to overcome in gaining a true understanding of the interdependent nature of the world. *Greed* represents the desire for “more” of whatever: wealth, possessions, love, knowledge, attention. *Hatred* represents the desire for “less” of whatever: corrupt politics, unwanted immigrants, aggressive police, obnoxious weeds. *Delusion* represents a cloudy view, neither pulled toward

nor away, but with no clear insight into the true nature of what exists.¹

These passions are sometimes described as the “animal” nature of a person. This is not necessarily meant to be debasing; rather, one could think of these as the hard-wired choices necessary for the survival of an organism. Paramecium and person alike must know when to go toward food and shelter and when to turn away from predators and destructive situations. Adrenaline and the other hormones are finely tuned to respond to the slightest nuance that can signal success or distress. The superb capacity for smell in dogs assists in such discrimination, as do the sharp eyes of hawks. Some Buddhist meditation practices focus on developing awareness of the slightest shifts in attraction and aversion, from even a single thought or sound. One can study moment to moment the micro-releases of adrenaline that destabilize quietly cultivated equanimity.

Violence can certainly be generated out of any of the three passions, but for a moment let us look more closely at hatred. The best translation for hatred is probably “aversion”, given the Buddhist understanding of emotions/passions as push and pull events. Tibetan scholar Robert Thurman makes a distinction between anger and hatred which may shed some light on the nature of violence. He defines anger as “vigorous energy that is determined to right a wrong situation”,² i.e., a justice-related response, based on a sense of fierce protection. For example, a mother would be filled with such vigorous energy if she saw someone threatening her child. Hatred, in contrast, is a “mental and spiritual poison”, with great capacity for destruction. Anger combined with compassion can be a powerful force for justice, for such energy is motivated by a response to suffering and a desire to eliminate it. Anger combined with hate, however, can be extremely destructive. Further, he says, forceful actions on behalf of those who are suffering are actually much more effective *without* anger, i.e., force need not be equated with anger, though it most often is shown this way in the media, for example.

Japanese temples are protected by fierce temple guardians, often in the form of massive growling bronze dogs. They are said to protect the Dharma from destructive threats. The wrathful deities of Tibetan iconography serve a similar function, compassionately threatening those who would even hold one thought of harming the teachings. These forms embody the fierce protective energy that is essential for guarding not only the teachings but also one’s awareness and equanimity. They serve as reminders that hate itself is the enemy, finding its fuel in the dissatisfaction and frustration of not getting what “I” want or conversely, getting what “I” *do not* want.

Sixth-century Tibetan teacher Shantideva offers some of his strongest words about anger in the chapter on “Patience”.

Whatever wholesome deeds,
Such as venerating the Buddhas, and generosity,
That have been amassed over a thousand aeons
Will all be destroyed in one moment of anger.³

¹ For an in-depth Buddhist analysis of emotional states, see, for example, *Mind in Buddhist Psychology*, trans. Herbert V. Guenther and Leslie S. Kawamura (Berkeley: Dharma Publishing, 1975).

² Robert Thurman, *Inner Revolution: Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Real Happiness* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1998), p. 173.

³ Shantideva, *A Guide to the Bodhisattva’s Way of Life*, trans. Stephen Batchelor, (Dharmasala: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, 1979), p.56. For extensive commentary on this chapter, see H.H. the Dalai Lama, *Healing Anger: The Power of Patience from a Buddhist Perspective* (Ithaca, New York: Snow Lion Publications, 1997).

How can anger be such a powerful force? The explanation lies in the Buddhist understanding of the law of cause and effect as a central organizing principle of the universe. A single moment of passion-driven action, unleashed in a receptive context, can generate countless repercussions causing endless suffering. Since one can never know the full impact of one's actions, Buddhist practice continually emphasizes kindness and compassion to mitigate karmic consequences. Furthermore, Buddhist practice places a strong value on the role of intention, recognizing the power of the mind to influence the course of events. Since Buddhists believe this mind is made of many causes and conditions and is not personally determined, it is seen as infinitely plastic, always capable of learning. Thus, the intention to harm coupled with a mind-state of anger is taken as a very serious misuse of the mind. If harm is committed when none was intended, then amends can be made by stopping the harm-causing action and apologizing for the harm caused. If harm is intentional, the agent of harm is unlikely to admit to such intentions and will engage in cover-up rhetoric or gestures to diffuse the blame. Discerning intent in harm is often a core work for advocates of social and economic justice.

II

Personal violence can be easily understood and recognized; Cobb has described this well and we all know this from our own experience. Economic violence, however, is less well documented, though it grows out of the same desires for self-protection and self-perpetuation. The self in this case, though, is not an individual organism, but is rather a state, a corporation, a non-profit organization, a law-making body, etc. Structural, systemic, or institutionalized violence generates karmic repercussion just as individual violence does, only usually on a larger scale. Each institution represents the collective weight and force of many individuals acting in concert toward some set of goals or policies. They may be, for example, making a profit, taking new territory, or perpetuating a belief system. Some economic institutions carry a particularly strong weight and thus karmic forces in the world today are the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Trade Organization. Millions of lives are affected by the choices these institutions make to secure a controlling role in global economic dynamics.

If these institutions have lives and roles in the world that reflect a self-perpetuating instinct, what, in fact, keeps them in check? As with individual organisms, inadequate resources or the threat of others who might destroy them become limiting factors. Such checks and balances have been fairly observable within national economic institutions: within the United States, we have witnessed the rise and decline of the steel industry, of the railroads, of the gold rush. At the turn of the new millennium, state limits have been systematically removed through political negotiation benefiting multinational corporations and international trade regulating bodies. Resources in every reach of the globe are up for grabs; threatening predators of larger scale do not exist. Perhaps only through such events as corporate takeovers are such multinationals engulfed, amoebae-like on the big screen of the macroscopic world.

Cobb sketches some of the economic history that has led to the current situation, outlining the belief system of economism that has supported the self-interest of those with the greatest wealth and most relevant economic theory. We can clearly see how economic power has come to define the relative worth of states and corporations. From a biological survivalist perspective, this turn of events should not be too surprising. However, for those with some empathic concern for others, the increase in global suffering is more than alarming.

Central to the takeover of economism has been, as Cobb says, a systematic eradication of certain values which stand in the way of wealth expansion for the powerful few. I would like to build on Cobb's central thesis, highlighting several characteristics of economic violence and then enumerating some of the values important to Buddhists, which have been eroded in this context. The current situation might be called a "crisis of restraint" or rather a crisis of the *lack* of ethical or common sense restraints in the milieu of global economism. Without adequate checks and balances on the international scale, rampant economic growth will proceed like the cancer it has been compared to. Through analysis of the forces at work, we can find points of application of ethical restraint. There is very important work to be done here, articulating the karmic repercussions of economic violence. Intention to harm can be routed out and named for what it is. Institutional expression of the Three Poisons in the forms of colonialism, domination, slavery, and exploitation can be documented and challenged.

As Cobb demonstrates, this work begins by naming what has been erased and calling it back into existence. This is no small task, but we have several thousand years of wisdom traditions to draw on. I believe this is a particular calling for people of faith, and it is a difficult one. We begin here to educate ourselves and find the inner resources of mind and heart to undertake this tremendously important work.

III

In this section I will highlight five characteristics that appear frequently in case studies of economic violence. Each of these has clear and observable impacts on social and environmental systems at many organizational scales. For each, I will also look at a specific arena of ongoing economic violence to draw attention to some of the social and ecological suffering that supports economic profit. This approach suggests a model, a way to work with the concrete realities of economic violence. By naming the values that underpin economic violence, one can then identify alternative values that act as restraints on unchecked economic activity and as stabilizers to promote a peaceful and just society. This process parallels the Buddhist practice of identifying the Three Poisons at work in one's consciousness and then cultivating the antidote values in order to establish equanimity and compassion for oneself and others.

Economies of scale, as mentioned also by Cobb, are central to economic violence. Consolidation and vertical integration of functions further enhance economies of scale by centralizing the profit-making capacity in the hands of a single controller. Factory farming of chickens, hogs, and cows offers all too graphic examples of this production ethic taken to new heights. Children's story books notwithstanding, the average U.S. farm today is hardly a family operation. During the last fifty years, family-scale agriculture has been more or less replaced by corporate-scale agribusiness. For example, ten large corporations control 92% of all poultry production today, with each producer owning as many as 500,000 layers and some over 10 million.⁴ Producers such as Tyson and Purdue own not only the chickens but also the slaughterhouses, the packaging plants, and the transportation and distribution system. The whole operation is under one economic umbrella—"from semen to cellophane".⁵

⁴ Quoted in a public forum on large farm operations May 2000 in Burlington, Vermont by speaker Ken Midkiff, Sierra Club coordinator for their *Corporate Hogs at the Public Trough* campaign.

⁵ *Ibid.*

By running such large operations, owners make enormous savings by buying feed in quantity, raising animals in quantity, hiring and training staff in quantity, and processing animals in quantity. They gain further advantages through tax incentives and government subsidies designed to draw operations to low-income areas to provide jobs. Often these incentives include reduced environmental regulation and poor on-the-job standards for workers. Chicken processors, for example, generally women of color, who handle icy chicken parts all day long, often develop arthritis in their hands as early as their late 20s.

Corporate farmers also benefit from economies of scale in transportation, refrigeration, packaging, and reproductive technologies. Factory farm animals are not allowed to reproduce naturally: semen is controlled and injected to guarantee consistency of line and product. High-yielding cows can be made to produce dozens of eggs at a time, and after artificial insemination, the embryos are transplanted into surrogate cows through incisions in their flanks.⁶ Biotechnology advances, such as bovine growth hormone for increased milk production, can be implemented on a mass scale easily, through supplements to mass-produced feed. Losses due to large-scale production techniques are insignificant compared to profits. Thus, unhealthy hens are left to die in their tightly packed cages and pulled out later rather than revived. With one or two staff caring for 10,000 chickens in tent-like sheds, it is simply uneconomical to care for specific individuals.

Clearly the bigger operations will crowd out the smaller operations, and this they have done on a massive scale. Because corporate agribusiness companies can reduce costs in so many aspects of their operations, their net gain is substantially higher than smaller operators. This gain allows them to establish more operations, develop consumer desire for their products, promote these products internationally, and lobby for favorable state and federal regulations. Power and profit accumulate rapidly. So does human, animal, and environmental suffering.

Human suffering takes its toll among not only the food-handlers, but also among neighbors of factory farms. Who wants to live near the stench of a major hog operation? Air and water pollution are common due to the massive amounts of waste produced by concentrations of farm animals. When Hurricane Floyd struck North Carolina, an estimated 100-500,000 hogs and over four million turkeys and chickens drowned. The enormous runoff of manure into local estuaries led to massive fish kills and an increase in the deadly *Phytheria* disease. In California's Central Valley, one mega-dairy contains 28,000 cows that produce the equivalent waste of a city of 700,000 people.⁷ One milking cow alone produces as much waste as 22 humans. Yet these factory farm waste pits generating methane and hundreds of odiferous compounds are not regulated as closely as human waste.

From the producer's point of view, the value of individual lives is clearly less than the value of the combined profits from many animals raised together. Likewise the value of environmental health and stability is of secondary value. In the case of factory farming, economic violence consists of disregard for the suffering of those who are at the very center of the corporate operation: the animals and the people who handle them. Animal protectionists decry such practices, for example, as chicken debeaking, veal calf confinement, cattle castration, and tail docking for pigs. Where family-scale farming was predicated on a love and care for individual

⁶ Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation* (New York: Avon Books, 1990).

⁷ Midkiff, *op. cit.*

animals, corporate farming is based on systematic disregard and even deliberate infliction of suffering. One can only wonder at the karmic spinoffs of antibiotic resistance, hormone injections, and opportunistic disease for both animals and humans as these elements circulate through the web of life.

A second trait associated with economic violence is *commodification of bodies*, briefly referred to by Cobb in his mention of sex tourism. Corporate animal agriculture aptly fits this trait, but here I would like to examine the dynamics of the increasing trade in global prostitution. Feminists have been the most recent protestors against the use of women's bodies for profit, but moral commandments against abusive relationship go way back in both the Buddhist and Christian religious traditions. Commodification of the human body for work or sexual slavery reflects a uni-dimensional relationship between the user and the used. The user is always in the dominant position—the one with power, wealth, or ownership, and the ability to determine what happens to the one to be used. This type of relationship necessarily eradicates values of human commonality and a shared concern for the fate of all humanity. Such relationships are clearly degrading to the one who is used, for whom self is identified only through the economic role of slave. In patterns of domination, the user will exaggerate differences to justify the superiority of the user over the used.⁸ The health and welfare of the slave or prostitute is then seen as no concern of the owner or renter, except as it may impact his or her own health (as in the case of AIDS).

The trade in prostitutes is not tracked in the *Wall Street Journal*; it is largely an illegal economic activity. Nonetheless, millions of women and billions of dollars are involved. In many places women are handled with varying degrees of brutality and are valued only for their sexual services. This trade is particularly strong where there is already a gaping economic disparity between the wealthy and the poor, engendering a kind of cultural nod of approval for treating women as the poor or lower classes are treated. Prostitution tends to follow military influence as well as colonial patterns of historic settlement. Thailand, for example, was the main center for rest and recreation for American soldiers in the Vietnam War; it is now the center of trafficking in Southeast Asia. According to feminist geographer Joni Seager, in the new global economy, Cuban women are being transported to Spain; Russian women are serving men in Europe, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia; and with modernization, the Vietnamese market is opening up as well.⁹

Christian and Buddhist groups have been working hard to prevent the spread of prostitution and AIDS in Thailand, but it is difficult when the market is so lucrative. A young virgin (assumed to be AIDS-free) of 10-12 years old will bring the highest price for first use. As the disease spreads, younger and younger girls are sold into the market, often serving as slaves in brothels, chained to their beds. The International Coalition against Trafficking in Women is particularly active in the Philippines where it has been opposing the State of Forces Agreement, which permits the U.S. military presence on the islands. This women's group opposes all forms of sexual exploitation—prostitution, pornography, sex tourism, as well as bride trafficking. They are working closely with the United Nations as human rights advocates to provide testimony to state governments and to serve as a clearinghouse for information on the global trade in women.

⁸ Spelled out in some philosophical detail in Val Plumwood's *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

⁹ From a guest lecture by Dr. Seager at University of Vermont, April 2000, Burlington, Vermont.

What values are lost in the commodification of women's bodies? German feminist Maria Mies suggests that male subjugation of women in this context is rooted in a larger social pattern of dominating nature through abstract, technological, mechanized relationships. She posits, "the more modern man interposes machines between himself and nature, ... the greater becomes his hunger for the original whole, wild, free, women and nature: the more he destroys, the greater his hunger."¹⁰ Sexuality then becomes the strongest direct contact with nature, revealing the extent of loss of relationship with the earth itself. This implies that any religious efforts to increase human-earth contact could serve to reduce the pressure on women as sole point of engagement with nature.

A third feature of economic violence is the *concentration of political and economic power* in the hands of fewer and fewer institutions. Throughout most of the twentieth century, the primary political holders of power have been the nation-states. Most recently, however, this power has shifted to transnational or multinational corporations (MNCs). Many of these have incomes and budgets larger than some European nations. Mitsubishi, for example, has 36,000 employees and an income larger than South Africa and Norway. Two-thirds of today's world trade is conducted by MNCs; half of this is between MNCs themselves. With such concentration of economic power, MNCs are in a position to increase the scale and intensity of their use of natural resources, and this they are rapidly doing, to the consternation of many. It would be hard to imagine that religious institutions could make any headway in slowing these behemoths down in their gobbling of the planet.

The rise of MNCs has been well documented by David Korten¹¹ and others; the social and environmental impacts of their economic activity are now being tracked much more closely than even ten years ago.¹² Here I shall review the mechanisms for protecting and increasing corporate power through three multilateral institutions: the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the World Trade Organization (WTO). To the extent that they do work with MNCs as global trade partners, these three institutions may be held accountable for the combined social and environmental violence stemming from MNC activity.

The creation of these three institutions has its roots in the post-World War II desire for economic recovery among the developed nations. While the United Nations was being forged as a mechanism for global conflict resolution, the Bretton Woods, New Hampshire meeting in July 1944 focused on creating an institutional framework that would promote economic prosperity so satisfying that no one would take up arms again. Some have suggested that from the start, the architects of these institutions favored U.S. leadership for this trade-friendly world economy with open access to global markets and raw materials. The World Bank and the IMF were established at the Bretton Woods meeting; the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs (GATT) was created later as a locus for settling the details of multilateral trade agreements. Though formally designated as "special agencies" of the United Nations, these three institutions carry on much of their work behind closed doors, safe from public scrutiny.

The missions of the IMF and World Bank were to offer loans to developing countries as a way to spur economic production of imports in developed countries. Despite internal

¹⁰ Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva, *Ecofeminism* (London: Zed Books, 1993), p. 137.

¹¹ David Korten, *When Corporations Rule the World* (West Hartford, Connecticut: Kumarian Press and San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publications, 1995).

¹² See, for example, *Multinational Monitor* published by Essential Information, Washington, D.C.

resistance to transnational economics of this scale, many such loans for major projects have indeed been made, often wreaking ecological havoc on the loaner countries. Big dams and mining development have been particularly devastating; major environmental resistance today is focused on the Three Gorges Dam in China, where predictions of flooding and displacement of local people are dramatic. Though the IMF and World Bank technically make loans to state governments, their projects usually involve MNC construction and procurement firms. The policies of the IMF and World Bank encourage MNCs to expand into developing countries, ostensibly to create jobs and encourage trade, though often the loss of social programs due to structural adjustment agreements is a far more consequential outcome.

Of the three institutions, it is the World Trade Organization, born in the 1995 Uruguay GATT rounds, that holds legislative and judicial powers to reduce global barriers to trade. This means that the WTO can literally block (or fine) nations that resist free trade of specific products. Though supposedly representing the interests of its 135 member nations, the WTO is guided strongly by the Group of 7 (Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, and the U.S.). In practice, rulings of the WTO can supersede national interests, sidestepping the needs and interests of the people to whom the national governments are accountable. This takes place through reviews of trade disputes between member countries, adjudicated by a non-elected board of three corporate trade experts behind closed doors. Often trade challenges are initiated by a multinational that feels its activities are compromised because of a specific national law. For example, tobacco companies have used such trade agreements to fight health reforms that would reduce harm from cigarette smoking. When Taiwan proposed a law to prohibit tobacco advertising and promotion and ban cigarette sales in vending machines, the U.S. responded to complaints from MNCs by threatening trade sanctions against Taiwan.¹³

As the WTO has begun to accumulate trade rulings in its mission to "harmonize" global trade standards, a pattern has emerged that favors MNCs and the economic elite nations to the detriment of social and environmental health. For example, despite Canada's ban on milk from cows injected with bovine growth hormone, U.S. dairy interests were able to secure a ruling which forced the importation of U.S. rBGH milk. Currently the European Union is resisting the importation of U.S. hormone-treated beef, taking a strong stand against further risk following the terrifying impacts of "mad cow" disease. For this they are being fined by the WTO, because of the loss of profits they are "causing" to the U.S. beef industry. Thus we find national interests and definitions of risk being overruled by transnational interests protected behind closed doors, with little opportunity to engage in ethical debate of any kind. Economism has become a complete ideology, with all the necessary institutional infrastructure in place to reinforce its goals. The challenge to those who perceive injustice and environmental threat is formidable.

A fourth characteristic of economic violence is the affiliated *culture of false promise*, leading to profits for the few and struggle for the many. Again, many authors have discussed the promises of development pointing out the failures of the Green Revolution and other technological offerings of the First World to the Third World.¹⁴ Much like the "trickle-down" theory, the rhetoric of promise always seems to cover up who the true benefactors are in terms of actual wealth. At the turn of the new millenium the gap between rich and poor is the widest it

¹³ Korten, p. 175.

¹⁴ Sulak Sivaraksa, *Seeds of Peace* (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 1992) and *Global Healing: Structural Violence, Social Development, and Spiritual Transformation* (Bangkok: Thai Inter-religious Commission for Development, 1999); and Vandana Shiva, *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology, and Development* (London: Zed Books, 1989), among others.

has ever been, and each technological revolution only seems to widen the gap.

In the 1950s agribusiness corporations such as Monsanto promoted the benefits of the Green Revolution, and certainly increased yields were apparent in the early years. Only later did ecological flaws in the approach show up in the form of insect resistance, soil degradation, and loss of diversity due to monocropping. Economic flaws included dependence on cash crop exports, gender inequities, and decline of health and social programs as result of agricultural development. The early rhetoric of promise was not based on the precautionary principle, now encoded in the proposed Earth Charter. This principle states that preventing harm is the best method of environmental protection and when knowledge is limited, it is best to take a precautionary approach, placing the burden of proof on those who argue that a proposed activity will not cause significant harm.¹⁵

The 1960s brought a repeat of the rhetoric of panacea with the promises of the nuclear industry, seeking civilian applications of the new technologies developed during World War II. Anti-nuclear activists compiled thousands of pages of documents demonstrating the dangers of nuclear power and the difficulties of dealing with nuclear waste. This fortunately slowed the building of nuclear power plants, but the promises are still very much alive in different parts of the world, despite evidence of safety hazard to the contrary.

Identifying this rhetoric of false promise is critical, for it is surfacing again at the turn of the millenium in the many fervent arguments being made on behalf of biotechnology.¹⁶ "Genetically engineered food will feed the world", "genetic screening will prevent disabled children", etc. The proclamations of biotechnology advocates predict a rosy future based on scientific ingenuity and industrial competence. Meanwhile the genetic engineering firms are making tremendous profits through patenting their "inventions". The ethical basis for what constitutes a new invention is being worked out at a rapid rate to the advantage of the genetic engineering firms, which are quick to advise the patent lawyers.

This rhetoric of promise is reinforced and delivered through the powerful media, concentrated in nine corporate giant MNCs, including Time-Warner and Disney (1997 sales, \$24 and \$22 billion respectively).¹⁷ With a U.S. government bent on establishing the U.S. as the top economic nation in the world, the corporate media play a critical role in pacifying those who would question the promise of biotechnology. Yet close behind the rhetoric of false promise lies betrayal and despair, the general population's sense that nothing can be done to counter the actions of the economic giants. It seems that whatever harm is caused by genetic engineering, the profits will be worth it, and any relief from suffering will have to be dealt with in the future.

A fifth characteristic which is well illustrated in the rise of biotechnology, is *the colonizing mind*. This mind views resources as territories to be claimed and protected for profit-making ends. The process of Western European creation of property through the piracy of others' wealth forms a complex political history, with many ramifications for today's economy. Indian conservationist Vandana Shiva points out that Europeans justified the original taking of

¹⁵ Principle #6, page 4 of the March 2000 draft, available on <<http://www.earthcharter.org>>.

¹⁶ Exposed in Vandana Shiva, *Biopiracy: the Plunder of Nature and Knowledge* (Boston: South End Press, 1997), among others.

¹⁷ Andrea del Moral, Athur Foelsche, and Erin Royster, eds., *The Plunders of Biotechnology* (Plainfield, Vermont: Third Nature Press, 2000), produced for the Biodevastation 2000 conference in Boston, p. 17.

American lands from native peoples by relegating them to inferior status, equivalent to that of nature.¹⁸ Ownership of property was established once lands were “improved” by turning natural ecosystems into labored fields. Physical colonization of territories through conquest goes back as far as recorded history. Economic colonization developed further as trade routes and modes of transportation for goods became more efficient. The last twenty years of trade globalization has fostered another wave of neocolonization from afar, as First World businesses make profits from Third World labor, without the complications of national sovereignty.

Of particular concern today is the application of the colonizing mind to biological life forms, through either bioprospecting or biotechnology patenting. This has been termed “biopiracy”, the privatization of what was originally communal resources for corporate profit. Shiva describes the current trend of colonization as claiming *interior* landscapes — women’s reproductive organs, cell lines of indigenous peoples, the genetic maps of organisms.¹⁹ What was once assumed to be an integral whole is now being colonized by the biotechnology industry as profitable parts. With the same mindset, biocolonialism devalues traditional cultural knowledge and technologies in favor of modern scientific technologies that can be patented and sold.

The patenting process in the United States is based on a philosophy of intellectual property rights, which parallel legal protection of land property. Patents were designed to reward intellectual creativity and stimulate competition for new technologies. With the advance of genetic engineering, patents are being applied to genetically modified organisms (GMOs) in the fields of agriculture, forestry, and pharmaceuticals. GMO soy and corn varieties are now planted in 30-50% of U.S. acreage, depending on the state. Individual product brands have been designed to be herbicide-resistant or to secrete their own pesticides. Cotton, tomatoes, potatoes, and sunflowers have been similarly manipulated.²⁰ Monsanto has even developed varieties of seeds that produce sterile flowers, thereby forcing farmers to purchase new seed every season. Anti-biotech activists in Europe and the U.S. have soundly attacked this “terminator technology”, forcing Monsanto to pull back on this development.

Bioprospecting pharmaceutical companies have made claims on cell lines of native peoples, using them to develop medical research products. Other patents have been approved for organ tissue lines and even cloned organisms. The prospect of all life claimed as a colonized resource for corporate profiteers is more than frightening; it signals new heights of dominating relationships invading every aspect of human activity. With vertical integration almost complete in corporate agriculture, the same giants sell all the commercial seeds, produce all the commercial fertilizers and pesticides, and control the processing and distribution of food products. Patenting of biotechnologically-invented food sources guarantees the biocolonizers secure income and almost complete control over tremendous territory.

To their credit, Third World nations have resisted attempts to universalize the U.S. patenting process. They see the process as serving primarily the colonizers and only very tangentially, if at all, the colonized. This is all too familiar. The WTO will soon face pressures to settle trade disputes regarding genetically modified organisms. Just this spring, European farmers discovered, to their outrage, that the rape they had planted was contaminated with GMO

¹⁸ Shiva, *op. cit.*, pp. 1-5.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

²⁰ For a full list of genetically-engineered crops available today, see Del Moral, Foelsche, and Royster, eds., *op. cit.*, pp. 27-28.

seeds. Because GMOs have been inadequately tested and may prove dangerous to native plants through genetic drift and bear unknown risks to human health, Europeans have been actively resisting further colonization by the biotech industry.

Economies of scale, commodification of bodies, concentration of political power, the culture of false promise, and the colonizing mind are more than five elements at play in economic violence. Fundamental belief systems associated with each of these are reinforced and validated in the others. Economic structures formally legitimize these belief systems into codified international trade relations. The particular combination of global power in the World Trade Organization, the multinational corporations, and the biotechnology industry has perhaps never been seen before in economic history. New forms and scales of economic violence are possible now on a global scale beyond most human experience. This is certainly a cause for consternation, and strong motivation for taking stock of endangered values, as Cobb has done.

IV

Let me now add weight to John Cobb's argument by lifting up several more core values that have been omitted from economic theory and practice. Though I draw from Buddhist philosophy and practice to define these, they could as well be drawn from other religious and ethical traditions, including Christianity. The greater point is that they are *not* present to any degree in the current practices of trade relations or multinational corporation expansion. They will require other leaders to articulate the importance of these values, not only for human development, but also for ecological stability under corporate impact.

The first is *accountability*. The principle behind this value is that one is responsible for the impacts of one's actions on others and thus one can be held accountable for these impacts. Such an ethic is embodied in the U.S. National Environmental Protection Act which mandates environmental impact reports for projects that will disrupt the stability of ecosystems. From a Buddhist perspective, this value is derived directly from an understanding of karma. Traditional definitions of karma referred primarily to actions by individuals; thus, for example, angry actions committed with the intent to harm carried some of the strongest repercussions. The law of karma describes the physics of energy release: when strong negative energy flows towards someone or something, there is bound to be a reaction or consequence. The same is true for strong positive energy. Kenneth Kraft has coined the term *eco-karma* as a way of expressing the long-term impacts of human activities on the environment, many of which we cannot predict.²¹

The current reign of economism tends to be in the direction of *avoiding* accountability, particularly in the multinational corporate realm, where business dealings are spread across many countries and loopholes abound. In fact, many MNCs choose to relocate in countries where legal and environmental accountability is lax, since this means there will be few penalties for using cheaper labor or materials. The use of sweatshop labor provides a good example; corporate clothing producers know consumers would prefer fair treatment of workers, but they plead lack of knowledge where work has been contracted out to sub-factories under foreign management.

²¹ Kenneth Kraft, "Nuclear Ecology and Engaged Buddhism" in Mary Evelyn Tucker and Duncan Ryuken Williams, eds., *Buddhism and Ecology: the Interconnection of Dharma and Deeds* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1997), pp. 269-290.

Though foreign workers make tennis shoes for extremely low wages, the shoes are sold in the United States for significant profit. It is very difficult to trace the path of all the parts of any product before it arrives in a U.S. shopping mall.

One realm of innovation by alternative economists is a different measure of national economic success. The current standard, Gross National Product (GNP), considers anything that generates a profit to be a good thing. Thus, divorce, disasters, air pollution, and prisons are all considered profitable along with the usual increase in material goods and services. Redefining Progress, a nonprofit group based in San Francisco, has proposed instead a measure of combined factors they call the Genuine Progress Indicator (GPI).²² They add in contributions from the volunteer and household economy which are not typically valued economically. They also subtract costs to human health from air and water pollution and costs for crime prevention, aiming to describe more accurately whether people are actually better off now than they were 30 years ago. In fact, according to their calculations, the rate of progress is not only leveling off, it is dropping. GPI offers a structural mechanism for better economic accountability, modeling a new way of choosing indicators that can help people, businesses, and governments monitor the impacts of their actions.

Closely related to accountability is taking *universal responsibility* for the well-being of all others. This value has been extolled many times by His Holiness the Dalai Lama.²³ It is expressed as the core imperative of the draft Earth Charter: "We are at once citizens of different nations and of one world in which the local and global are linked. Everyone shares responsibility for the present and future well-being of the human family and the larger living world."²⁴ In the Buddhist tradition, this value is based on an understanding of the law of interdependence, that all actions and beings mutually shape and condition each other. Thus what one person does socially, environmentally, or economically is felt by others to varying extents. When that "person" is a multinational corporation or the World Trade Organization, such actions are felt by many, many beings.

Taking universal responsibility for the well-being of others directly contradicts the business philosophy underlying economism, as Cobb describes. The most profitable business is the one that can use human and natural resources the most expediently and efficiently, taking the least responsibility for social and environmental consequences—usually seen as costly add-ons. Universal responsibility reflects a relational worldview in which every player is seen as a significant element in the mutually causal web. This is central to Buddhist virtue ethics, as developed in the guiding precepts. In contrast, the objectifying view associated with exploitation and misuse of people and the environment, depends on viewing the parts of the system as independent and unrelated. This view more easily justifies use for profit, as in removing trees from the forest as so much standing timber.

Some companies in Germany are now taking greater responsibility for the waste generated by their products and are designing more parts to be recycled when the product is no longer useful. Animal rights advocates argue for "humane" animal farming, promoting a greater sense of responsibility for reducing animal suffering. Organic farming is increasingly popular,

²² Clifford Cobb, Ted Halstead, and Jonathan Rowe, "If the GDP is up, why is American down?", *The Atlantic Monthly*, October 1995, pp. 1-15.

²³ H.H. the Dalai Lama, *Ethics for the New Millennium* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1999).

²⁴ Earth Charter, *ibid*, p. 1.

not only because of its safer and tastier produce, but because of its commitment to take responsibility for the soil and for the community it feeds. These are encouraging signs, but they are miniscule next to the enormous responsibility a big corporation carries for all the people, plants, and animals it affects.

A third value is *service*, the heart of the Bodhisattva vow. From a Mahayana Buddhist perspective, service represents the highest expression of human development. The third of the Three Pure Precepts is a vow to “save all sentient beings”—an impossible but dedicated task for the Bodhisattva. Service in the Buddhist context includes not only caring for another person’s basic needs, but also serving others on the path to liberation. Since liberation from desire (and the driving afflictions of the Three Poisons) is the central goal, it would definitely *not* be in the best interests of most businesses to practice service in the Buddhist sense. Without desire, who needs to consume products?

If a service ethic were at the basis of our wealth distribution system, it would produce a very different configuration of economic holdings. Land, education, and profits would be distributed to benefit all, rather than just the upper classes. The highest calling would be giving one’s life to help others rather than making profit and gain through economic activity. Those committed to a life of service would be held in high regard and supported in their training and efforts. This is not to say that it is impossible to live a life of service in the business world, but many aspects of global corporate activity indicate it is far from right livelihood.

Service as path raises issue with the practice of usury and credit, or making profit from the loaning of money. In the Islamic tradition, usury is considered illegal and immoral. This has created certain conflicts among the Muslim nations in entering the global trade market, where credit is a given. This concern has not been critical in Buddhist practice, but it is worth examining; considering the rate at which wealth multiplies based on credit and compound interest. The service of money-lending could be seen as similar to other forms of service: a gift of generosity. Making extra money from acts of service puts them in a different, more self-enhancing light, opposite to the goals of enlightenment.

A fourth value is *contentment* or “santutthi”. This can also be translated as ‘satisfaction or the absence of craving. Since craving is what generates attachment and prevents liberation from the ego-self, absence of craving assists one in moving along the path. Over thirty years ago, after the First National Economic Development Plan was drafted, the Thai government prohibited Buddhist monks from teaching this concept; they felt it impeded economic growth and development.²⁵ If people were content with what they had, how could they be stimulated to buy consumer products? In Thailand, where Buddhism is the state religion and plays a significant role in social as well as economic culture, this proclamation has no doubt had a strong impact. Liberated from the restraints of this value, Thais are now free to join the rest of the modern world in the grip of over-consumption.

Activists committed to reducing consumption such as members of the Voluntary Simplicity movement or the Alternative to Consumerism group of Thailand, see their work as extremely radical and threatening to the current race toward globalization. They act on the

²⁵ Pipob Udomittipong, “Thailand’s Ecology Monks”, in Stephanie Kaza and Kenneth Kraft, eds., *Dharma Rain: Sources of Buddhist Environmentalism* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 2000), pp. 191-197.

premise that reduced consumption will decrease the drive for production of consumer goods. As part of their work, they support local community development to increase contentment based on non-consumer values. This approach can be applied in both First and Third World contexts, where strengthening community generates local empowerment. Sometimes, though, the allures of American-style materialism cannot be muted and economic growth remains a primary goal.

A fifth value is *generosity*, one of the six paramitas or perfections. This value is held in the highest regard among Buddhists and is seen as a mark of a spiritually developed person. "No hoarding", one of the ten prohibitory precepts in the Mahayana tradition, applies to material goods, love, and to the teachings themselves. Generosity is codified in the system of alms-giving from villagers to monks in many Asian countries. In simple karmic terms, being generous is a good way to "make merit" and ensure a more propitious next life. Practicing generosity offers a way to express one's understanding of the nature of the universe: always ebbing and flowing, never accumulating in one place permanently.

The rhetoric of international development often promotes projects as acts of generosity, reflecting the virtue of those providing the development aid. Critics of development programs point out that this rhetoric may provide a good cover for business deals that serve the donor much more than the receiver. The spirit of this precept would be more fully expressed in philanthropy, the giving away of wealth in the service of others. An economy that favored philanthropy (with higher tax write-offs for charitable giving, for example) would create a base of support for community development, schools and libraries, cultural programs, and environmental monitoring. Accumulating wealth would only be seen as virtuous to the extent that one could share this wealth with others, much as King Asoka did in early India.

These five values reinforce each other in Buddhist virtue ethics. One who reduces desire and lives life without attachment is able to freely practice generosity and enjoy contentment. One who takes universal responsibility for the well-being of others is more likely to assume full accountability for his or her own actions. One who commits to a life of service as the highest expression of the Bodhisattva path will seek ways to liberate others from hoarding, dissatisfaction, and non-relational views of the world. These values have been well-described in the Buddhist literature as guidelines for individual enlightenment. What is difficult is finding ways to apply them to institutions whose actions are equally subject to the laws of karma. Certainly there are roles for enlightened leaders, whose influence can shape organizational behavior. But leaders come and go, particularly in this era of corporate mergers and CEO buyout packages. More hopeful and perhaps ultimately more effective are ethical policies that can define restraints on corporate activities. The Sullivan Principles and Ceres Principles, and now the Natural Step program all move in this direction.

In today's globalized economic structure, what is needed are codes of ethical restraint at both the individual corporate level and at the level of systemic governance structures such as the World Bank, IMF, GATT, and the World Trade Organization. The World Bank and IMF have shown some responsiveness to environmental and social pressures regarding the ethicality of their projects; this is a good sign. The WTO, however, with its rising political power, bases its adjudications entirely on scientific advice, not ethical guidelines. There is currently no mechanism for ethical input into trade dispute decisions. Creating a forum for such deliberations would be a first step in pressing for restraints on the domination of global culture by economic values.

V

Why is it important for people of faith to address these issues and concern themselves with economic violence? Already many individuals and organizations are challenging the direction of globalization. Demonstrations in Seattle in November 1999 followed by protests in Washington, D.C., in April 2000 expanded on earlier teach-ins that engaged activists and intellectuals from around the world. Thousands of people are speaking to the impacts of corporate economic and political domination as it displaces community values and respect for individual lives. Is there a particular role in this conversation for people of faith?

First, such involvement offers a path of action. Buddhist leaders such as Sulak Sivaraksa and others in the International Network of Engaged Buddhists take their activism as *engaged practice*. Socially-engaged Buddhism as a field of endeavor now includes hospice work, gay rights activism, environmental work, peace advocacy, prison support, and race relations.²⁶ Economic justice is only a very small part of this already small movement. Thai monks in the Phra Sekhiyadhamma group have taken on the plight of the poor and the ravaged environment on several Dhammayatra walks.²⁷ As they walk with villagers, they raise issues generated from *lokanuwat*—“spinning according to the world”—the common Thai word for “globalization.” Much much more could be done by leaders of Buddhist communities in solidarity with each other across the globe. Practicing Buddhists who are in a position to influence the direction of global economism—scholars, environmentalists, lawyers, government employees, NGO staff—may take up this work as a way to serve all sentient beings and fulfill their bodhisattva vows. Carrying out such efforts with compassion and fierce wisdom protection could be encouraged and supported by local Buddhist communities.

Second, people of faith are often more experienced in expressing ethical concerns. Using the language of their faith tradition, they can articulate the particular points of digression away from a relational, life-supporting view and help others find a way to “speak truth to power”, as the Quakers would say. People of faith traditions have not only a wealth of knowledge and literature to draw on, they also have heightened sensitivity to ethical nuance. Through the effort of examining their own thoughts and behavior, they are familiar with the tensions involved in finding a path to clarity and right action. They can offer patience to others as they engage the most difficult and sobering arena of global economics. Solace, courage, and solidarity can be immensely helpful in the shared task of developing better alternatives to economism.

Third, this task can be seen as central to what Catholic geologist Thomas Berry calls “the Great Work”.²⁸ In his most recent book, Berry outlines the “Great Work” as the transformative generation-wide effort to change human-Earth relationships from disruptive and destructive to mutually enhancing and beneficial. Berry sees this as not merely an idealized goal but a necessity, if the present Cenozoic is not to be a terminal era. This century’s Great Work is equivalent, he says, to earlier socially transformative efforts of the Greeks, medieval Europe, and third century China. Berry expresses foreboding with the “extensive disarray in the biological structure and functioning of the planet” that signals a painful loss of human intimacy with the

²⁶ See, for example, Christopher Queen, ed., *Engaged Buddhism in the West* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2000) and Sulak Sivaraksa, ed., *Socially-Engaged Buddhism for the New Millennium* (Bangkok: Suksit Siam, 1999).

²⁷ Santikaro Bhikkhu, “Dhamma Walk around Songkhla Lake” in Stephanie Kaza and Kenneth Kraft, eds., *op. cit.*, pp. 206-215.

²⁸ Thomas Berry, *The Great Work: Our Way into the Future*, (New York: Bell Tower, 1999).

natural world, overridden by the primacy of the economic order.²⁹

Berry argues that economic conflicts in today's world cannot be described by the traditional dualisms of political alignment: conservative/liberal, republican/democrat, First World/Third World. Instead, he says, the primary tensions are between ecologists (or environmentalists) and developers. Developers, in this sense, are those who believe in the tenets of economism as primary. Environmentalists include those who consider life and the Earth community as primary. Reconciliation between these two tensions is not easy but it is especially difficult today when every aspect of life has been absorbed into the commercial context.

To participate in this Great Work is an opportunity for people of faith. It may even be a calling for some. For me personally, as a practicing Zen Buddhist and scholar of Buddhism and ecology, this work is central to my teaching in Environmental Studies. My commitment to the Bodhisattva way casts this teaching and scholarship in the context of service, taking universal responsibility for the liberation of my students and all suffering beings. The comments in this paper are informed by my understanding of the Buddhist laws of karma and interdependence. I have explored these concepts in the context of economic violence, looking for vehicles of analysis and ethical reflection. Like Cobb, I would hope that these explorations are accessible to people of diverse faiths. Clearly the scope of this work is too vast and multidimensional to be taken up in isolation.

Thus this paper, as one of two paired essays, is an invitation to consider the implications of economic violence for the state of our world and to consider ways in which people of faith can participate in this Great Work. Buddhists must examine the tendency to passivism for which they have been criticized and find ways to actively engage the principles of their practice. Learning to accept the shortcomings of others (including corporations) can be taken too far, justifying a relative view of all behaviors. Though Buddhists have a weak history of international political involvement, perhaps the dark cloud of economic globalization, which threatens so many human values, will be compelling enough to arouse the fierce protective energy of the wrathful deities. Certainly the economic order of the 21st century offers ample ground for practice in the study of institutionalized greed, hatred, and delusion.

Like others, Buddhists have the choice to help turn the direction of the global economy. What will be their offering?



²⁹ Ibid., p. 3.