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## Interbeing Autonomy and Economy: Toward Enduring Social and Ecological Justice

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## *Interbeing Autonomy and Economy*

### **Toward Enduring Social and Ecological Justice**

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**Abstract:** This article is part of a much larger work in progress that seeks to formulate a new Interbeing Economic Model. Against the now recognised urgency of unfolding social justice issues related to climate change, I provide a Buddhist deconstructive critique of neo-classical economics which is demonstrated to be the underlying cause of our current problems. A more just and equitable form of distributive justice and economics, based on the concept of interbeing as developed by Thich Nhat Hanh, is posited as an alternative. Interbeing principles also allow us to move beyond the critical theorists' limited definition of autonomy. A comparative articulation of interbeing autonomy shows that individual consumer driven autonomy is not true autonomy, as it problematically disembodies us from the world. The New Interbeing Economic Model (or, what I differently refer to as *systems integrity building economy*) is introduced as a possible alternative in order to restore our rights as responsible citizens to be able to interbe in a healthy way. Through this new economic model, I argue, we can move beyond the ill-defined concept of mere sustainability, and toward a healthier regenerative model that promises truly lasting social and ecological justice.

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#### **INTRODUCTION**

This paper is based on a broader framework of principles and analysis that aim to serve a larger emancipatory project. This

project seeks to make not merely an academic contribution to engaged humanistic Buddhism, but also a Buddhist contribution to the area of social justice in more practical terms.

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I will show that to move toward true social justice, both inner individual as well as outer social and institutional change is required—and that such a change is indeed possible, and is one that may be aided by the now recognised urgency of the unfolding social justice issues related to climate change. As a result of the emerging climate change, those with least resources and opportunities will be the ones who suffer the most in terms of the loss of their traditional lands and homes, their means of production, and the now well publicized and predicted crop and food shortages that will even affect those of us in the wealthier nations.

Specifically, I seek to demonstrate how an engaged Buddhist response, based on sound principles, can build on and add valuable insights/principles in the areas of both social justice theory and critical theory, in positing a more just and equitable form of distributive justice. I will try to illustrate how the means to such a more just and equitable form of distributive justice lies in the cultivation and development of both an individually realized *interbeing autonomy* that is facilitated within a collectively established *interbeing economy* (or what I differently refer to as *systems integrity building economy*). Both *interbeing autonomy*, and *interbeing economy*, are the two key progressive Buddhist conceptual models that I will briefly define and introduce in this paper, as a means for positing an alternative path toward achieving a truly lasting and sustainable social and ecological justice.

It is important to mention here that social justice is inextricably linked to ecological/environmental justice, and that we must strive to not merely achieve an interdependently realized “sustainable” social and ecological justice, but rather we should strive to achieve a *regenerative* interbeing social and ecological justice. In the latter part of this paper, I will illustrate the importance of moving beyond mere sustainabil-

ity to a dynamically healthier regenerative paradigm based on a conceptual framework grounded in the twin notions of *interbeing autonomy* and *interbeing economy (systems integrity building economy)*.

## I. THE VALUE OF A BUDDHIST DECONSTRUCTIVE MODE OF ANALYSIS AND CRITIQUE

To begin with, it is important to recognize that even the concept of ‘social justice’ itself cannot be taken as a given in the polemical world of competing ideologies, especially as espoused by the still dominant and influential advocates of the Chicago School economic paradigm, and the Austrian School.<sup>1</sup> Together, these two schools of economics have molded and continue to perpetuate the dominant socio-economic paradigm that is responsible for the rapidly unfolding disaster of climate change, and the consequential ecological and social injustices that are emerging.

The Buddhist teaching has many unique principles that can contribute to both a deconstructive analysis of the dominant unjust economic paradigms, such as the Chicago School, and also to the construction of alternative ways of interbeing in the world in socioeconomic terms.

The Buddhist principles and methodologies of emptiness and interdependent origination, and its guided teachings and meditations in the deconstruction of both the self and indeed of all phenomena, make it very suitable as an inspirational form of deconstructive analysis in its own right. However, such a deconstructive mode of analysis derived from Buddhist philosophy is one that is unlike most postmodernist at-

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<sup>1</sup> The Chicago and Austrian Schools represent the still dominant schools of neoclassical economic advocacy, and are still effective despite their lack of a proper empirical grounding, in contrast to more empirically grounded alternatives such as ecological economics.

tempts at deconstruction. It is different in that it is balanced with the equally important principles of Bodhichitta or compassion, and the 'middle way view'. This is unlike some extreme applications of postmodern deconstruction amid which even the referents can be lost, or discarded. Armed with a more balanced form of deconstruction based on the 'middle way view' principle, it can also draw on the rich field of methodological precedents established by the Frankfurt school of critical theory.<sup>2</sup>

Employing a reflexive Buddhist deconstructive analysis, I will provide below a brief examination of the arguments for and against the concept of social justice itself, which writers such as Frederich Hayek in volume two of his three volume series, *Law, Legislation and Liberty* (1973, 1976, 1979) do not even accept as being relevant or real in the operations of distributive justice, or social justice in its wider context, as illustrated by the title of volume two, "The Mirage of Social Justice."

## II. THE MIRAGE OF NEOCLASSICAL ECONOMICS AND ITS DENIAL OF SOCIAL AND ECOLOGICAL JUSTICE

Friedrich Hayek the founder of the Austrian School of Economic Thought, and the recipient of a Nobel Memorial Prize in Economics is adamant that social justice is a nonsense. In the preface of his second volume entitled 'The Mirage of Social Justice', he states in regard to the term/concept 'social justice': "I believe indeed the greatest service I can still render to my fellow men would be if it were in my power to make them ashamed of ever again using that hollow incantation."<sup>3</sup> And, "It does not belong to the category of error but to that of nonsense, like the term 'a moral stone'."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> The Frankfurt School is an early school of critical theory that developed a multi-disciplinary emancipatory approach to research methodology.

Here, one can critically examine a few of Hayek's arguments. For instance, he writes,

Justice requires that in the 'treatment' of another person or persons, i.e., in the intentional actions affecting the well-being of other persons, certain uniform rules of conduct be observed. It clearly has no application to the manner in which the impersonal process of the market allocates command over goods and services to particular people: this can be neither just nor unjust, because the results are not intended or foreseen, and depend on a multitude of circumstances not known in their totality to anybody.<sup>5</sup>

Hayek implies throughout his work that the market, and a market based society, is impersonal and therefore one cannot ascribe to it agency, and without personal agency there can be no injustice. This forms the ideological basis of Hayek's economic advocacy of an 'anything goes' market.

Social justice, however, according to its proper definition, is concerned with the nature of the allocation of scarce goods (and 'bads') to a population. 'Bads' in economic euphemistic jargon are referred to as 'externalities'. These are the negative by-products of economic activity, such as the various types of land, sea and air pollution, ecosystemic destruction, climate change and so on. In regard to the distribution of these 'bads' or externalities, it is an invalid argument to refer to the impersonal process of the market as though it is not possible to trace individual agency, and thereby individual or individual corporate responsibility.

<sup>3</sup> Hayek, Friedrich, A. *Law, Legislation and Liberty. Volume 2. The Mirage of Social Justice*, p. xii

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, p. 78.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, p. 70.

ity, for any unjust distributions of goods (and services) and 'bads'. In many cases we can trace agency for some 'bads', such as the intergenerational consequences of uranium mining, to a relatively small number of vested interests such as the small but powerful nuclear industry.

Society is an aggregate of agents who are in turn prodded by powerful interest agencies such as the nuclear industry lobby composed of people who are, in Buddhist terms, "attached" to particular interests and modes of dualistic thinking. Such attachments are often also accompanied by ignorance and greed, to such an extent that those involved in making or implementing such policies will knowingly disregard the very serious negative consequences the continuation of their economic policies may bring about. Given today's advances in ecological and environmental sciences, Hayek and his colleagues can no longer claim that any such distribution of 'bads' cannot be foreseen. It is also wrong to assert, as Hayek does, that if the distribution of 'bads' is unintended/undesired, then it cannot be called unjust because of a lack of intention. In fact, it is the intention to make short-term economic gain despite full knowledge of irreversible distribution of 'bads' that such economic and market policies are often devised and imposed on future generations.

To not invalidate his argument, Hayek also only largely focuses on the distribution of good 'goods', and ignores the ubiquitous distribution of 'bads'. This appears to be a common argumentation strategy advanced by the advocates of the Chicago School. The degree of injustice is intolerably high when one considers that the distribution of 'bads' is often all-pervasive and uniform, such that it is often the non-consumer and the non-agent outside any direct transaction that receives the same amount of 'bads' as the agents involved in and benefiting from any such economic transaction. As the effects are often not felt until a considerable

amount of time has passed, it is often the case that the non-agent in fact receives more 'bads' than the agents of the transaction.

Such a ubiquitous distribution of 'bads' that affects human and non-human, agent and non-agent, factors alike is clearly unjust, and indicates that neoclassical economics has been reduced to a pseudoscience, one that is nothing more than a professional advocacy agency that seeks to continue to push the real costs of its activities onto everyone else. This is at the expense of our now deteriorating natural common wealth. Sophisticated techniques such as discounted cash flows are used to manipulate and downplay future environmental costs which future generations have to bear. As non-agents, both human and non-human, we are forced to be the unwilling recipients of this unjust distribution of 'bads', and this represents an intolerable unfreedom.<sup>6</sup> That is, we cannot enjoy the freedom from such an unfreedom of having to receive the ubiquitous distribution of these 'bads' or externalities. The neoclassical economic advocacy model now facilitates the imposition of unfreedoms upon those not yet even born, and is causing the extinction of not just various species, but the extinction of entire ecosystems.

Hayek's perhaps more well known colleague, Milton Friedman from the Chicago School, in his well known work *Free to Choose* (1990) utilizes a less sophisticated, but openly more reckless argument in his defence of the neoclassical/libertarian 'right' to distribute 'bads' to agent and non-agent.

In regard to government regulatory activity, and the government agencies created to stop or reduce the still ever increasing distribution of 'bads', Friedman states,

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<sup>6</sup> I use the term 'unfreedom' here, having been inspired by Amartya Sen's coining of the term in his work, *Development as Freedom* (1999).

Instead of being concerned with specific industries, they covered the waterfront: the environment, the production and distribution of energy, product safety, occupational safety and so on....Government expenditures on both older and newer agencies skyrocketed... During the same decade, economic growth in the United States slowed drastically...

Why link these two developments? One has to do with assuring our safety, protecting our health, preserving clean air and water; the other, with how effectively we organize our economy. Why should these two good things conflict?<sup>7</sup>

Friedman then dismissively answers his own question by saying that the ecology movement and the consumer movement and so on, all have one thing in common, and that is, "all have been antigrowth." He then states later that all regulatory authorities are...cutting across industry and relatively unconcerned with the consumer's pocket book.<sup>8</sup> His only argument for the negation of protections from the distribution of 'bads' is this reckless preference for keeping the price of goods down 'for the consumer', by giving industry the complete freedom to do what it likes. Such a simplistic argument would not appear to be worthy of a Nobel Prize, but such arguments from the Chicago school are not rare. In fact, they reveal how modern day neoclassical economics is less of a science, and more of a mere advocacy profession maintaining a mirage of science. I am not alone in holding such a view of neoclassical economics. Hazel Henderson, for instance, also writes, "Economists can no longer

<sup>7</sup> Friedman, Milton and Rose Friedman. *Free to Choose. The Classic Inquiry into the Relationship Between Freedom and Economics*, p. 190-191.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, p. 194.

falsely claim scientific status for their arguments nor confuse the public by pretending to be scientists. Why not embrace the truth and call the profession 'economic advocacy'... Remember, economics is not a science, it is just a profession, with less quality control than most others."<sup>9</sup>

It is ironic that the title of Friedman's book uses the word 'freedom' twice, when in fact he is supporting and advocating the imposition of 'unfreedoms' on us all, agent and non-agent alike—forcing us to unjustly be the recipients of an overwhelming tide of multiplying 'bads' or externalities rapidly destroying our natural common wealth and ecosystems. Until we can see through this mirage, and replace it with an empirically grounded ecological economics, one that may follow along the lines of what I will propose in my interbeing economic model, then the ecological and social injustices will continue to multiply and build up, pushing us towards a state of collapse as warned by Jared Diamond in his work, *Collapse*.<sup>10</sup>

### III. THE NEOCLASSICAL ECONOMIC VERSION OF GENERAL SYSTEMS THEORY

Through a very selective reading of General Systems Theory, Hayek justifies his conclusion that a market based society cannot possibly have a system of rules in place to create a system of just distribution/'allocation of advantages and disadvantages among particular people or groups.'<sup>11</sup>

We find the laying down of Hayek's curious ideological version of General Sys-

<sup>9</sup> Henderson, Hazel. 'Beyond Economism: Toward Earth Ethics.' In Maathai Wangari, Gorbachev Mikhail, Corcoran Peter Blaze, and Strong Maurice F. Editors. *The Earth Charter in Action: Toward a Sustainable World*, p. 75.

<sup>10</sup> Diamond, Jared. *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed*. New York: Viking, 2005.

<sup>11</sup> Hayek, Friedrich, A. *Law, Legislation and Liberty. Volume 2. The Mirage of Social Justice*, p. 85

tems Theory in his first volume of his series which is entitled, 'Rules and Order'. But before we analyze his deceptive version, it is important to briefly espouse the authentic General Systems Theory as articulated by its founder Ludwig von Bertalanffy in his work, *General Systems Theory. Foundations, Developments, Applications* (1968).

Bertalanffy formed his theory through his observations as a biologist. In its simplest definition, Bertalanffy states that a general system (theory) is, "sets of elements standing in interrelation."<sup>12</sup> And here we can be looking at very complex systems with a multitude of elements and variables that are beyond the scope of normal mathematical modeling. From its origins in the need to understand biological processes, there are now many applications of General Systems Theory in many different fields such as cybernetics, game theory, and decision theory, and the use of differential equations is a common methodology in these various versions or offshoots of the original theory.

Turning now to a brief analysis of Hayek's version of this theory, in reference to the spontaneous order of complex systems Hayek writes,

There will be many aspects of it over which we will possess no control at all, or which at least we shall not be able to alter without interfering with—and to that extent impeding—the forces producing the spontaneous order. Any desire we may have concerning the particular position of individual elements or the relation between particular individuals or groups, could not be satisfied without upsetting the overall order.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Bertalanffy, Ludwig von. *General Systems Theory. Foundations, Developments, Applications*. p. 38.

<sup>13</sup> Hayek, Friedrich, A. *Law, Legislation and Liberty. Volume 1. Rules and Order*, p. 42.

There are two main flaws here.

The first is that he incorrectly implies/argues that all is well if we do not interfere by design or purpose, as that would be an intrusion on free forces producing the spontaneous order. This belief emanates from his biased libertarian views, which are expressed throughout his three volumes.

The second flaw is that he implies we shall/should not purposively seek to alter and thereby interfere with the complex spontaneous order of a system. Hayek's argument is invalid, since he ignores the fact that spontaneous non-purposive/unregulated economic activities may in themselves not only impede beneficial/positive forces that create/harmonize spontaneous order, but also destroy the natural resilience of natural systems. They destroy the systems integrity of natural systems by pushing them beyond their threshold points to states of collapse. This seems to be a perverse cherry picking approach to general systems theory, one that relies upon a traditionally one-way and linear Western understanding of both interdependent causality, and of general systems theory.

Hayek goes further in his apparent politically motivated articulation of the theory and its cousin the second law of thermodynamics or the law of entropy:

The classical instance of rules of the behaviour of the elements which will not produce order comes from...the law of entropy, according to which the tendency of the molecules of a gas to move at constant speeds in straight lines produces a state for which the term 'perfect disorder' has been coined. Similarly, it is evident that in society some perfectly regular behaviour of the individuals could produce only disorder: if the rule were that any individual should try to kill any other he encountered, or flee as soon as he saw another, the

result would clearly be the complete impossibility of an order in which the activities of the individuals were based on collaboration with others.<sup>14</sup>

While Hayek does briefly mention an evolution of rules that makes social life possible, and while in the above quote, he may only be saying that a chaotic disorder is possible in some instances, and not in all instances of patterns of perfectly regular behaviour, his choice of example reflects a Libertarian bias, whereby he seeks to illustrate where he can, that imposed regulatory rules lead to what he sees as undesirable consequences. His reference to the law of entropy is, “presented as little more than a rhetorical stratagem, which is invoked and represented with a view to creating credibility and authority for a particular statement”<sup>15</sup>—in this case Hayek’s advocacy for a completely unregulated free market economic order. In support of this he later revealingly states, ‘We shall see that it is impossible, not only to replace the spontaneous order by organization...but to also improve or correct this order by interfering in it by direct commands.’<sup>16</sup>

Of course it is also equally possible to simply posit the opposite case to Hayek’s example of his killing rule, whereby a uniform rule, such as the Buddhist principle or

behaviour to refrain from harming others as a perfectly regular behaviour. This would be contrary to Hayek’s carefully selected example, produce not chaotic disorder but harmonious order—a rule or behaviour that promotes an order, or an inter-being systems enhancing social order, and ecological and social justice.

Hayek’s ‘greatest crime’ in his use of General Systems Theory as a mere rhetorical stratagem is where he refers to an intellectually dishonest distinction between, “the terms ‘organism’ and ‘organisation’:<sup>17</sup>

It was therefore tempting to borrow such terms as ‘growth’, ‘adaptation’, and ‘function’ from them. They are, however, spontaneous orders of a very special kind, possessing also properties which by no means necessarily belong to all spontaneous orders; the analogy soon becomes more misleading than helpful.<sup>18</sup>

In attempting to maintain his distortion, Hayek ignores his contemporary, Ludwig von Bertalanffy, and instead refers to an obscure source that discusses a purported anticipation of cybernetics by Adam Smith.<sup>19</sup>

Hayek strategically ignores his contemporary, the founder of General Systems Theory, Bertalanffy, because contrary to Hayek’s false truth claims, the theory has its beginnings and evolution in Bertalanffy’s study of the biological organism. Bertalanffy had in fact developed various differential equations for the various types of biological growth, and of course also discovered various parallel behaviours/patterns in other fields.

Hayek’s negation of biological patterns/systems also demonstrates a com-

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, p. 44.

<sup>15</sup> Here I have employed part of a Critical Theory based analytical statement by Alvesson and Skoldberg that is used to deconstruct this type of argument. The original statement is: “In more radical variations on these themes, reality is presented as little more than a rhetorical stratagem, which is invoked and represented with a view to creating credibility and authority for a particular statement. Facts cannot be separated from fiction... postmodernists parasitically play off the ironies, incoherencies, inconsistencies and inter-textuality of sociological writings” (Alvesson, Mats and Kaj Skolberg. *Reflexive Methodology, New Vistas for Qualitative Research*, p. 152).

<sup>16</sup> Hayek, Friedrich, A. *Law, Legislation and Liberty. Volume 1. Rules and Order*, p. 51.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, p. 52.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, p. 156.

plete disembodiment of his preferred socio-economic model from the greater ecological model, in which any human-made socioeconomic model can only be but a subset. We will now briefly look at the authentic theory.

#### IV. A BRIEF REFLEXIVE HERMENEUTICAL ANALYSIS OF THE DOCTRINE OF INTERDEPENDENT ORIENTATION AND GENERAL SYSTEMS THEORY

Contrary to Hayek's false truth claims and his use of the law of entropy as a mere rhetorical stratagem, Bertalanffy explains the principle of anti-entropy or negentropy observed in living organisms and ecosystems. In contrast to the trend of physical processes moving towards increasing states of entropy, he observes that,

Living organisms maintain themselves in a state of high order and probability, or may even evolve toward increasing differentiation and organization as is the case in organismic development and evolution.<sup>20</sup>

This is because living organisms are open systems as opposed to closed systems, and they therefore display anti-entropy behaviours. This has important implications for a more properly situated ecologically based economic system, which acknowledges that we too must mimic such systems of natural order in also sourcing our energy from the 'current account' of the various forms of available solar energy, as opposed to only sourcing energy as though we were operating in a closed system with no solar inputs into our open system. If we

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<sup>20</sup> Bertalanffy, Ludwig von. *General Systems Theory. Foundations, Developments, Applications*, p. 143-144

do not observe the natural empirically based laws of ecological systems, and instead follow the false truth claims of economic advocacy, then we inevitably push the global commons towards a point of irreversible collapse.

General Systems Theory also mirrors and provides an empirical support for the Buddhist doctrine of *paticca samuppada*, or interdependent origination. They both come to the same findings in regard to the realization that all phenomena, both living and inanimate, are the results of complex interdependent relationships. *Paticca samuppada* is often presented in the form of the twelve links of psycho-physical factors, and consists of ignorance, volitional actions or formations, consciousness, name and form or mind and body, the sixfold senses and their objects, contact, feelings, craving or desire, grasping attachment, coming to be, birth, and decay and death. Like systems theory, it is also a non-linear set of relationships, where each of these links contains the effects of all the other links. Each link is both a cause and effect of each and every other link.<sup>21</sup> (For example, contact between the sense organs, the sense object and the sense consciousness leads to feeling, and this feeling may in turn lead to craving which again leads to sense contact, in addition to leading to grasping attachment). Each link is multi-directional and mutually causative.

General Systems Theory as already briefly introduced, describes complex interdependent relationships. With its origins in the biological sciences, it was realized that, the mechanistic laws of classical physics, "...were insufficient to explain the complex interactions which take place in a liv-

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<sup>21</sup> This does not imply backward causation in time, as the 'links' are not mechanistically time sequenced linear events, but are closer to sets of aggregates with the potentiality of acting in a moment of time as either an effect or as a cause of anyone of the other 11 links. This will be more fully articulated in my current project which is a work in progress.

ing organism."<sup>22</sup>

A mechanistic and atomistic view of the world was no longer adequate to either scientifically understand or describe the complex living world, as it was observed that the whole is indeed much more than the mere sum of its parts. Bertalanffy's 1940 paper, "The Organism Considered as a Physical System,"<sup>23</sup> together with his later works, assisted in the transition to a new scientific and empirical methodology. "The organism is not a static system... it is an open system in a (quasi-) steady state, maintained constant in its mass relations in a continuous change of component material and energies..."<sup>24</sup>

As already mentioned, Bertalanffy referred to the definition of systems as, "sets of elements standing in interrelation."<sup>25</sup> "Systems enclose and are enclosed by other systems with which they are in constant communication, in a natural hierarchical order."<sup>26</sup> This applies to sets of relationships within the organism, e.g., between its cells, and between its organs, and also between the organism and its environment. Various systems principles have been observed and modeled, such as principles of exponential growth, equifinality, positive and negative feedback loops and so on. The findings of interdependence are thus strongly grounded in empirical systems science and general systems theory.

Macy stated in her groundbreaking work, *Mutual Causality in Buddhism and General Systems Theory*, that the outcome of this reciprocal hermeneutical analysis of pa-

<sup>22</sup> Laszlo Ervin. *The Systems View of the World. A Holistic Vision For Our Time*, p. 8.

<sup>23</sup> This 1940 paper, "The Organism Considered as a Physical System," originally published in German, is included as an English translation as chapter 5 in Bertalanffy, Ludwig von. *General Systems Theory. Foundations, Developments, Applications*. pp. 120-138.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, p. 121.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, p. 38.

<sup>26</sup> Macy, Joanna. *Mutual Causality in Buddhism and General Systems Theory. The Dharma of Natural Systems*, p. 72.

*ticca samuppada* and general systems theory is

... a Dharma of Natural Systems, which I perceive as a philosophic basis and moral grounding for the ecological worldview emerging in our era. This emerging dharma discloses moral values that do not stem from divine commandment nor from human nobility alone but instead inhere in the fundamental causal interconnectedness of all phenomena. This interdependence sets the limits and provides the scope for our conscious participation in reality.<sup>27</sup>

In the preface to her work, Macy states that while she wrote it out of religious and philosophic concerns made urgent by the global crisis of the time, particular political and social concerns are tangential to the philosophic purposes of her book, and that her aim was "more fundamental: to explore the nature and causal implications of the systemic co-arising of phenomena."<sup>28</sup> In this regard it remains at a more metaphysical level of analysis, rather than being applied in a more direct way to create a new ethical framework or guiding set of principles.

However, Macy did say that she hoped that this *dharma* of natural systems would not only serve "systems theory and Buddhist scholarship, but also our common welfare."<sup>29</sup>

Little if any work has been done in this area, and I will in my own project, through further analysis, build on this, and utilize the mutually reinforcing and clarifying principles of General Systems Theory, and the Buddhist doctrine of interdependent origination, or interbeing, in formulating an accessible and useful ethical model that

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, pp. xii-xiii.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, p. xvii.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, p. xvii.

will also have an empirical grounding. This will be one that provides an empirically grounded system that supports a properly balanced form of rationality, as opposed to the potentially dangerous forms of rationality as espoused by Richard Dawkins and the proponents of unbridled *laissez faire* economics.<sup>30</sup> With the above brief overview of and grounding in a reciprocal hermeneutical analysis of *paticca samuppada* and general systems theory, I will now turn briefly to the subject of interbeing autonomy.

## V. AN EMPIRICALLY GROUNDED INTERBEING AUTONOMY

Thich Naht Hanh provides profound insights into the potentiality of a real experiential understanding of *paticca samuppada* through his progressive interpretation, which he calls 'interbeing'. It echoes the above reciprocal hermeneutical analysis of *paticca samuppada* and general systems theory. Perhaps one of his most lucid and beautiful expressions of interbeing is in his poem, only part of which I reproduce below:

If you are a poet, you will clearly see that there is a cloud floating in this paper. Without a cloud there will be no rain; without rain, the trees cannot grow; and without trees we cannot make paper. If we look even more deeply, we can see the sunshine, the logger who cut the tree....In fact we cannot point to a single thing that is not here—time, space, the earth, the rain...the cloud...the mind. Everything coex-

<sup>30</sup> A good paper which examines the troublesome premise underlying *laissez faire* economics is the aptly titled "Rational Fools: A Critique of the Behavioral Foundations of Economic Theory," by Amartya Sen, published in *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, Vol. 6, No. 4 (Summer, 1977), p. 317-344.

ists with this sheet of paper. So we can say that the cloud and the paper 'inter-are'. We cannot just be by ourselves alone; we have to interbe with every other thing.<sup>31</sup>

Both Thich Naht Hanh's poem and the reciprocal hermeneutical analysis of *paticca samuppada*/interbeing and General Systems Theory, show us the delicate interdependent complexity of our conventional existence. To maintain our place of interbeing in our precious ecosystems, we must as citizens be free as agents to engage in economic activities that are not unjust and injurious to others. We must begin to once again act as responsible citizens and not as mere consumers.

In seeking to create an emancipatory economic model informed by the notion of interbeing, I have tapped into the tradition of Critical Theory as espoused by Horkheimer, Adorno and Marcuse. Critical Theory formed an analytical lens that once focused on Western society, revealing that the subject society or..."societies were turning into closed totalitarian systems in which all individual autonomy was eliminated."<sup>32</sup>

Of course in this evolving manifesto, here we are talking about meaningful individual interbeing autonomy. (Here too, we must be careful in our understanding of the term, 'autonomy', which in terms that is faithful to the interbeing outlook should mean the autonomy or freedom of the individual as an agent to act in cognition and respect of the nature of his or her interbeing). It becomes clearer that, in terms of a Critical Theory perspective, Western societies have become, and are increasingly becoming by degree, ever more closed totalitarian systems, in which all meaningful and healthy forms of interbeing are methodically eliminated.

<sup>31</sup> Thich Nhat Hanh, *Heart of Understanding*, p. 3-5.

<sup>32</sup> Routledge. *Concise Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, p. 182.

It is here that the concept of interbeing comes into its own, in that it clearly identifies and situates us, as we interare with each other, and with everything around us. It moves beyond the limitation of the definition of Critical Theory, that inaccurately describes the desired attribute of the agent as being one of mere 'individual autonomy'. 'Individual autonomy' is in itself an inaccurate and dangerous notion to describe the desired attribute, since it leads to the frequently professed claim that in our modern postmodern democratic society, we indeed do have 'individual autonomy'.

After all, we are free to consume, and we are free to choose to consume more and more, only subject to our own temporary limitations. And in fact ironically it is the so-called individual autonomous rational agent that seeks to maximize his or her own marginal utility, that is the unit or base that forms our current dominant economic model—one that seeks to maximize his or her own marginal utility. But ironically we are not free to interbe, as we would like to in a non-pathological way. Gatekeepers and short-termists not only prevent us from being able to interbe in a non-pathological way, they in fact direct us to interbe in an extremely problematic form, though in a way that is structured to not only disguise this agency, but also to structurally normalize our pathological agency. This is an unjust agency of servitude to a form of instrumental irrationality, an agency of servitude to short-termist corporate totalitarianism as foreseen by the Frankfurt School's early critical theorists in the 1930s.<sup>33</sup>

The only antidote is a striving for a conventionally real interbeing autonomy. Just how we strive to achieve such a true interbeing based autonomy is explored in the next section.

## VI. A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO A SYSTEMS INTEGRITY BUILDING ECONOMY, OR, AN INTERBEING ECONOMY FOR SOCIAL AND ECOLOGICAL JUSTICE

David Loy in his work, *The Great Awakening*, refers to the sociological truism, "People create the social system, but the system creates people."<sup>34</sup> And to have any chance of achieving interbeing autonomy, and the freedom from problematic autonomy, we must strive for not just individual personal transformations, but a transformation of our socioeconomic paradigm in a move away from the injustices of the neo-classical model of economic advocacy—an advocacy that only seeks a perverse freedom to be able to make short term gains at the expense of the destruction of our global commons. As demonstrated by the above brief Buddhist deconstructive analysis of some of the arguments of two of these leading advocates of the still dominant paradigm, it can be seen that their arguments are not even empirically based, and are built on a house of cards.

Neoclassical economic advocates such as Hayek, Friedman, and colleagues, would appear to have a fear of empirical truths, as demonstrated by the experience of one of the founders of ecological economics, Herman Daly.

In a chapter on Herman Daly, Mc Daniel describes Daly's experience as an economist at the World Bank in 1992, when he was given the opportunity to comment on a draft report entitled, "Development and the Environment":

In an early draft, a figure labeled, 'The Relationship Between the Environment and the Economy', contained a box titled 'economy' with an arrow labeled inputs going into

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Loy, David. *The Great Awakening*, p. 87.

the box and another arrow exiting the box labeled 'outputs'.<sup>35</sup>

Daly requested to have an identifying box drawn around and containing the economy box. He also requested that the outer box be labeled 'environment'. His requests were refused. He also said that it was necessary to demonstrate that the economy is a subsystem of the larger ecosystem, and is dependent on it. In later asking about a similar diagram with the same empirical claim, the then chief economist of the World Bank, Lawrence H. Summers said, "That's not the right way to look at it."<sup>36</sup> Even today at my university, the University of Queensland, the ecological economics course is only a voluntary elective for economics students, and is only attended by a small number of students. And the political economy course is such that I have observed that the majority of students on a vote by hand count come out supporting the Chicago school of economic advocacy. And this is despite the fact that we are in an age of severe climate change, with unfolding ecological and social injustices. It is thus not an easy road to remove the influence of the three poisons of ignorance, greed and grasping attachment from the way economics is both taught and administered at the highest levels.<sup>37</sup>

In the course of developing my project, which includes a necessary alternative economic model, it is evolving as a significant expansion of what resulted when Schumacher asked himself, "What would a Buddhist Economics look like?" The advantage today is that there is Schumacher's work to build on, in addition to the emergence of new fields of research disciplines, such as ecological economics and industrial ecol-

<sup>35</sup> Mc Daniel, Carl. *Wisdom for a Livable Planet*, p. 141.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> My observations of the University of Queensland economics courses were made in 2007 as part of my earlier research.

ogy. In the context of these new emergent disciplines, and in the context of the various ecological and social justice crises, and a reciprocal hermeneutical analysis of *paticca samuppada* and General Systems Theory, I am asking myself what would an Interbeing Economics look like?

I am attempting to set out a system of Interbeing Economics which is based not on the outdated model of the self-interested rational man/woman seeking to maximize utility, but on another model whereby each agent seeks to either maintain or enhance the integrity of each system and subsystem within which he or she interacts. This is a move to a Systems Integrity Building Economy, or, briefly, Interbeing Economy, that recognizes the fundamental importance and value of either maintaining the integrity, or better, enhancing the integrity of each system. Each economic act, is thus one that is measured/valued in terms of how it impacts upon our ecosystems integrity, environmental integrity, social justice integrity, psychological well being integrity, physical well being integrity and so on. Integrity attacking economic activities in an Interbeing Economic system would be identified and penalized in a relatively fast phasing out transition process to sustainable and regenerative economic activities.

In regard to the importance of adopting a systems integrity based approach, one can look to the then farsighted view of Aldo Leopold who in his 1949 book the 'Sand County Almanac' said, "A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise."<sup>38</sup>

It is beyond the scope of this paper to go into much depth in the articulation of interbeing economics. But some insight into what is actually possible in the real conventional world is provided in the next section that highlights some of the emerging devel-

<sup>38</sup> Leopold, Aldo. *Sand County Almanac*, p. 240.

opments that lend themselves to, and support an interbeing, or systems integrity based, economy.

## VII. EMERGING REAL WORLD APPLICATIONS THAT ENABLE AN INTERBEING ECONOMY

As Arundhati Roy optimistically said, "Another world is not only possible, she is on her way."<sup>39</sup> And indeed there are some emerging trends and developments that give room for optimism in the ability to be able to one day practically move towards a systems integrity enhancing economic model/paradigm.

An interbeing economic paradigm is dependent upon systems integrity designed products and services that do not create and allow the continued unjust distribution of 'bads', externalities, or systems integrity attacking activities. And it is here, in this area of suitably designed systems integrity enhancing products and services, that there are many encouraging developments.

There, is for example, the replacement of the old 'cradle to grave' concept of product design by a 'cradle to cradle' concept of product design. This is the 'cradle to cradle' concept of McDonough and Braungart, which is based on an interbeing design principle that all products can be designed so that at the end of their first life, they can be disassembled into either or both organic nutrients or technical nutrients. This is also based on the principles of industrial ecology, where waste equals food.

The relationship between design and economics is even more far reaching and profound when we consider that a company that makes a 'cradle to cradle' product such as a television, would become a

service provider, who retains full responsibility for the product, and thereby takes it back at the end of its first life. At this stage the product is not merely recycled in a slowed down path to the inevitable toxic enhancing grave, but rather it is disassembled, and its technical nutrients are upcycled in a closed loop, to a new and improved product, and the organic nutrients go safely back into the environment. McDonough's business partner and chemical engineer, Braungart, has successfully designed a textile dying system for a company so successfully that it could stop using toxic dyes and turn to completely non-toxic dyes in a transformation that was so successful that the waste water that the factory plant discharges is cleaner than the water that comes in. This is an example of interbeing design and economics in practice.<sup>40</sup> This particular example demonstrates through the discharge of cleaner water back into the ecosystem, that it is possible to improve upon the limitations of mere sustainability, and be able to aim for and achieve a regeneration of declining ecosystems that is not in dualistic opposition to a reasonable level of economic gain. It is possible to thus move away from systems integrity attacking activities, to systems integrity maintaining activities, and then to systems integrity enhancing economic activities.

In addition to acting as powerful and effective change agents in the areas of 'cradle to cradle' and 'waste equals food' based design, McDonough and Braungart are simultaneously acting as educators in practically showing a new way of engaging in design and economic activity that no longer results in the creation of 'bads', externalities or systems integrity attacking activities. Instead they show that it is possible to move to a regenerative form of economic

<sup>39</sup> Arundhati Roy's words from an address she gave at a forum on globalization at Porto Alegre, Brazil on January 27th, 2003.

<sup>40</sup> McDonough, William and Braungart, Michael. *Cradle to Cradle. Remaking the Way We Make Things*, p. 107-109.

activity that can not just maintain, but enhance an ecosystem or environment. And directly in the realm of education, McDonough announced his “Declaration of Interdependence” whereby he espouses the profound possibilities and necessity for ‘cradle to cradle’ and ‘waste equals food design’.<sup>41</sup>

This gives hope that it is possible to also eventually make the requisite changes to our educational system, such that it becomes a means to leading individuals and society to become embodied and aware systems integrity enhancing agents. Such an educational system would encourage people not to become dumbed down consumers in a society of merely having and desiring to have, but rather encourage them to become real citizens—citizens who are encouraged to promote and enhance their own systems integrity as fulfilled beings, and who are encouraged to promote and enhance all the other systems and subsystems of which they are a part.

## CONCLUSION AND SUMMARY

Buddhist doctrine has many unique doctrinal principles that can contribute to both a deconstructive analysis of the dominant unjust economic paradigms, such as the Chicago School, and also to the construction of alternative ways of interbeing in the world in socioeconomic terms.

I exposed the deceptive arguments of the proponents of neoclassical economic advocacy and revealed how in spite of appearing to argue for freedom, Hayek and Freidman have been advocating the continued imposition of ‘unfreedoms’ upon human and non-human non-agents alike, via the unwelcome and ubiquitous distribution of ‘bads’.

I then looked at the intellectually dis-

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<sup>41</sup> McDonough, William. ‘Declaration of Interdependence’ In *Dimensions of Sustainability*. Editor Scott, Andrew. (London and New York, E and FN Spon, an Imprint of Routledge, 1998).

honest arguments used by the founder of the Austrian economic school, in his attempt to use his strange version of General Systems Theory to legitimize his neoclassical economic advocacy.

Providing a brief summary of the reflexive hermeneutical analysis of the doctrine of interdependent origination and authentic General Systems Theory, I then showed how a General Systems Theory also mirrors and provides an empirical support for the Buddhist doctrine of *paticca samuppada*, or interdependent origination.

Additionally I emphasized the importance of interbeing autonomy, and its significant difference from individual autonomy as advocated by critical theorists. This is the necessary element/component to a Systems Integrity Building Economy which I briefly outlined.

Following the above, I looked at emerging conventional real world applications that included the encouraging ‘cradle to cradle’ and ‘waste equals food’ alternatives. I highlighted how emerging alternatives such as these indicate that there is another way of engaging in design and economic activity that shows that it is possible to move not only from the present system of destructive socioeconomic violence to one of sustainability, but ultimately to a regenerative alternative.

The brief overview and analysis as set out in this paper hopefully shows that a progressive Buddhist response based on a reflexive hermeneutical analysis of the profound Buddhist doctrine of interdependent origination and authentic General Systems Theory, coupled with other Buddhist principles, can make a significant contribution to escaping the ecological and social injustices imposed on us and our fellow sentient beings by the still dominant neoclassical model. This old advocacy model has been shown here to be empirically unsound in comparison to the proposed alternative of an interbeing, or systems integrity enhancing, economic model. The new model pro-

mulgated here is one that offers the opportunity to not only celebrate our interbeing relationships with each other and our ecosystems, but to enhance them by taking us from a less than weak form of sustainability, to a genuinely *regenerative* system, and a position of enduring ecological and social justice.

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