



Group Assembly Process (GAP) - Stirring Paper

The bare necessities: Pushing from monetary economics back towards natural economies

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*Look for the bare necessities
The simple bare necessities
Forget about your worries and your strife
I mean the bare necessities
Old Mother Nature's recipes
That brings the bare necessities of life*

The Jungle Book Animation Movie

La vie est belle, le monde est pourri.

Manu Chao

DISCLAIMER: If so many wise people have been proven wrong, we are probably wrong ourselves :-)

Abstract

Finding resources to realize true necessities leads to degrowth. Whereas promoting commodities for profit maximization, in order to gather property, leads to exponential growth and inequality. The goal of this paper is to stir discussion around these three axes: a) necessities, b) natural economies, and c) the cultural and ideological manipulations that sustain the current economical system, in an attempt to look for alternatives that push back the line towards natural economies.

Key words: True necessities, natural economies, patriarchal economy, the way to degrowth.

Do apes like porn? Necessities and satisfactors

In the beginning everything was “natural”. Trees reached for minerals with their roots, and oxygen with their leaves. Whales filtered plankton while swimming, and birds ate cherries and flies. Living beings, including apes and humanoids, *knew exactly what they needed*, and reached for it. They could not be fooled. Do you think that apes like porn?

Then, a species appeared that could make paintings on the wall, that could think symbolically about the past and the future. That could express their emotions. But, along with this, they could also be deceived. With images, myths and illusions. They could miss interpret perception.

A few millennia later, we don't know anymore what our *true* needs are, because we have been forced to spend all our lives *choosing*. We've lost inner contact with our true necessities.

Wanting means being in contact with one's self. *Choosing* means putting the attention to what is being offered from the outside, which may have nothing to do with our needs. Thus, the term *true* necessities here, is an attempt to distinguish between endogenous wants and needs, from exogenous, induced offerings of consumer goods.

Maturana [Maturana H. and Varela F., 1984] define life, at all levels, in terms of *auto-poiesis*, and Rebeca Wild [Wild R] evolves the idea by stating that children (and adults), need to grow in safe environments, where they can get in touch with their true necessities and develop their true potentials, with attentive care but without interference.

Max Neef [Max-Neef M., 1993], in his seminal work, settles the difference between necessities, satisfactors, and goods and services. Thus, according to Max-Neef, there are only a few basic necessities (subsistence, protection, affection, understanding, participation, leisure, creation, identity, freedom and transcendence), that can be realized in multiple ways, with multiple satisfactors (food is a satisfactor for survival, dance is a multiple satisfactor for affection, participation, leisure, etc.). Finally, goods and services implement some satisfactors, but are not unique. Thus, a stone house is only one of several ways to implement housing, which is a satisfactor for subsistence and protection.

Max-Neef's approach, thus, turns upside down the principle of economical science that postulates that necessities are unlimited while resources are scarce. In his approach, *necessities are finite, whereas human wit (the implementation of satisfactors) is unlimited*.

Gib & nimm (give & take)

Natural economies can be defined by the following behavior rules:

- 1) Ask for (or take) what you need, *without offering anything in exchange*.
- 2) If you don't use it, give what you have been asked for, *without asking for anything in exchange*. [When you'll need something, you'll resort to rule 1 yourself].

Natural economies are, therefore, communal.

Natural economies can be proved to be the most effective and, at the same time, equitable

way to allocate resources to necessities in a simulated market or fair [Bofill P., Pardo F, 2014, a) and b)].

There are many current examples of natural economies: nature, family, friends, volunteers, squatter social centers, free shops, eco-villages, farming communities, and many aboriginal or indigenous people.

Natural economies take place in many different forms.

Natural economies based on demand, place necessities first.

In natural economies, work is not employment, but engagement with the group.

The goal of natural economies is to locally satisfy true needs, until there is enough. It makes no sense to accumulate further, because you are not going to “buy” anything any more with what you accumulated.

By asking, everyone gets according to their needs. By giving, everyone contributes according to their capabilities.

When patriarchy dropped in

In [Maturana] Maturana suggests that patriarchy started in the Neolithic, when nomads stopped wandering in order to grow their own gardens and flock. Wolves suddenly became competitors and enemies, and former hunter-gatherers, who used to kill respectfully for food, started to kill with hatred. This feeling of property extended inside the household, and patriarchs developed the right to impose their will, even to their wives and family.

With patriarchy, then, greed took over, and with it a rush for property accumulation. Since then, a huge pyramid has built up, that allocates most of the property to a very few people (if money keeps rising up this way, it will hopefully take off, all the way to Mars, and leave us alone).

Property needs to be protected, with weapons and law. With fear. As 1st year-Economics best-seller argues [Mankiw N.G., 2012], “from the point of view of Economics, the role of the state is to protect private property”. Whose private property is he talking about?

Law is therefore the legitimation of violence in order to protect profit and property of a few from those who have less. And, in its attempt to reach for everything, law goes as far as regulating seeds, knowledge, music, or women wombs.

NOTICE: From an anthropological perspective, the above looks like western-centered evolutionism. It's just a matter of speaking. There exist hunter-gatherer communities nowadays, and cultures with different degrees of patriarchy.

No free lunch: monetary profit is *not* sustainable

Assume that 50 people enter a marketplace in the morning, each with a basket of goods for sale, and each with a list of necessities to buy. Let's assume that all baskets and necessity lists have a similar value (if such a statement means anything), and that the goods match exactly the necessities. Let all merchants enter the marketplace with exactly the same amount of money. Since prices are decided by agreement between every two merchants, by the end of the day some merchants have more money than others!

If we define the word *sustainable* as something that is available and can be extended to everybody, then, *monetary profit is not sustainable*. If somebody gets *profit*, someone else is

necessarily taking a *loss*. There's no other way. There's no free lunch!

As shown in [Bofill P., Pardo F, 2014, a) and b)], the Give & Nimm rules do not have this problem, because there is no money nor bartering.

“Thou shall give something in exchange for what you take”

There is a deep moral feeling in us that compels us to give something in exchange for what we take. And if we don't, we feel in *debt* with the person that gave us something. Putting things the other way around, we then become reluctant to give anything away “for free”.

Money is anything you take in exchange for what you give.

Money is anything you offer in exchange for what you ask.

At some point in history, the “gib & nimm” rule was *wrongly* interpreted as giving and taking *from exactly the same person*, and everything went astray. Morals came in again, and stated that this exchange should be *fair*.

Billions of “fair” exchanges make the delight of successful companies.

There is no such thing as fair trade. There is no such thing as ethical banking.

To be fair, no one should get more than what they need.

No wonder Adam Smith was a moralist!

The Sucking Octopus

Money is the means by which capital grows. By means of profit, credit and interest, capital grows exponentially. Whereas savings based on wages grow, at most, linearly (that is, for those who have employment). Growth is not a measure of welfare. Without the expectation of growth, there is no expectation of profit and, therefore, no investment. And the system collapses. Growth is a *requirement* for the economical pyramid to survive. *At any cost*.

GNP per capita is a joke for those who know a little statistics. It is the average of an extremely skewed distribution. It tells nothing about the conditions of most of the population, and the surrounding environment.

Growth means exploitation: over nature, over women, over labor, over customers, over anything that can be bought and sold. The history of patriarchy is the history of monetarization of the intimate worlds of caring and natural economies, as a means of exploitation.

It is a means of taking people away from their natural resources in order to make them dependent. Dependent on money, on employment, on production-based goods, on computer based social networks, on commodities that make people happy slaves, while reshaping society and production networks to the interests of ever bigger corporations.

And everything, people say, is for the sake of progress.

The Octopus sucks. It sucks money with it's ever deeper tentacles, up to the top of the pyramid. Money is said to circulate, but actually it moves up in ascending spirals, uploading property.

In the world of equal opportunities, the winner takes all.

The naked emperor

The self-called “science” of Economics is just an ideological apparatus for the legitimation of indiscriminate pillaging, and it is founded on a set of probably deliberately false assumptions.

Let's just consider the three supposed functions of money:

- 1) “Money is a measure of value”. False. Money is a measure of *price*, and price is something arbitrary, subjective and changing, that usually favors the “strongest” side. Any measure based on money, is therefore arbitrary. Value, on the other side, is uncountable, it cannot be measured.
- 2) “Money is a medium of exchange”. A medium which, as we have seen, *provides profit to some and losses to others*. In fact, with the “gib & nimm” set of rules, *there is no need for exchange at all*.
- 3) “Money is a store of value”. True for a few (in fact property is stored in many different kinds of “money”). Most of the people, though, don't have a chance.

Pushing back to natural economies

So, how can we move back to natural economies? We need to embrace back the values of intimate spaces, of feminism and caring economies. We need to get rid of dependencies and get the resources back that will realize our true necessities. We need again safe environments for our children and ourselves. We need to get back in touch with our necessities. We need to realize that part of our lives develops in natural economic relationships, and we need to enlarge those spaces:

We need to get rid of money and, in the meantime, we need to use money wisely, so that in the near future we won't need money anymore.

True. But how is this going to happen?

In order for degrowth to happen, it is important to keep in mind that *growing more slowly is still walking in the wrong direction*.

*“Only after the last tree has been cut down,
Only after the last river has been poisoned,
Only after the last fish has been caught,
Only then will you find money cannot be eaten”.*

Cree Indian Prophecy

References

DISCLAIMER: We'd like to apologize to the authors we cite for oversimplifications, miss-interpretations, and citations out of context. And for the incomplete references.

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