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## THE CHANGING NATURE OF HUMAN SECURITY

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**SPECIAL FEATURE | Toward a Common Theory of Value**



## Toward a Common Theory of Value

### Part One: Common Being

James B. Quilligan

#### Riddle of the Commons: Does Property Have Properties?

Thus begins an inquiry on the meaning of value in economic philosophy. This series of articles will attempt to reconceptualize the social and natural order of economics through an analysis of the commons—the natural, genetic, physical, social, cultural and intellectual resources which people manage by negotiating their own norms and rules. (For brevity's sake, Part One uses the term 'commons' loosely to refer to both self-organized commons and unorganized common pool resources—a distinction which will be spelled out in subsequent articles.) The recurring theme in these writings is the creation of a commons-based economy which expresses a more inclusive type of value than in traditional economics. A common theory of value—rooted in philosophy, psychology, sociology, anthropology, linguistics, communication, organizational behavior, technology, history, culture, environmentalism, economics, law, and social and political theory—will explore many of the leading ontological presuppositions in our present belief systems.

To view this framework in the contemporary setting, these articles will also examine the forms of national and global administration that have been developing over the past few decades. This is the phenomenon that has been defined as the Market State (following the work of both Philip Bobbitt and Phillip Blond, whose interpretations differ significantly from what is presented here). It is arguable whether an equitable social contract has ever been made between the people and the state; but *there is clearly no popularly chartered agreement now for the market system* which has been imposed on world society. The new national and transnational rules and standards of the Market State are replacing the system of nation-states so rapidly that few of us have adequate language to characterize what is actually taking place. Perhaps the most insidious aspect of this economic totalization is that nature, society and culture—including people's capacities and relationships—are completely reduced to a single standard of value. The Market State describes its deductive methodologies for tracking economic value as rigorous and consistent, underpinning them with various theories of nature, human behavior, freedom and society. Yet many of these proofs rest on timeworn premises that are unraveling and mounds of evidence now proving false. What is certain is that the Market State has no inductive theory of value and this is causing the very fabric of society and nature to rupture.

Most economists, it seems, take the beliefs and theories of economics as received wisdom and give little thought to the philosophy of material and immaterial things. Economists are not trained to investigate the existence of things as natural objects or

the phenomenological relationships we have with them. These articles will describe how the current theory and practice of economics make fundamental assumptions about the interactions between objects, individuals and social wholes which violate many principles of metaphysics. For example, the things that economists presume to be the natural units of the economy—currency, prices, contracts, households, factories, corporations, jobs, consumer demand, individual preferences, beliefs and rationality—are aggregated mostly from economic indices, not through human experience in the ordinary world. We must ask, how did these fundamental units of economics actually arise? Are such categories really 'natural kinds,' like the basic units of analysis found in the sciences? Why aren't these essential predicates of economic thought—which are supposed to explain the production and distribution of things for people—derived from the values, meanings and life-experiences of people themselves?

Historical documentation, going back thousands of years, shows that the concept of salable commodities—natural or social resources turned into finished, commercial goods—was an alien concept until it was introduced by the merchant classes and legitimated through the enforcement powers of the state. Gift economies don't use fungible units of monetary cost and benefit—gifted objects are simply not reducible to an equivalent or substitutable standard of value. What, then, makes natural objects different from 'goods?' If the commodity itself is not a natural kind, would the axioms of modern economics remain universally valid? Does metaphysics offer any models of irreducible economic kinds that could apply to all human beings?

In many ways, the commons are the riddle of our existence, physically and metaphysically. They constitute an enormous variety of non-human and human phenomena existing everywhere on Earth and providing our greatest source of wealth. Yet we hardly acknowledge them. Could we say that commons are more essential than commodities? Perhaps. But if they are an essential economic kind, wouldn't this mean that both *depletable* (natural, physical) resources and *replenishable* (natural, social, cultural, intellectual) resources are common goods? *How could a basic economic unit be both material and immaterial?* The answer is startlingly simple. Since their presence and meaning to a person are not inherent in them, common goods do not exist in and of themselves. Value is the meaning that arises when a thing is placed in a broader system of conceptual categories whose relationships and connectedness are recognized by others. And if value does not arise from the qualities of an object, then *property has no properties*. That is why a new metaphysical basis for economics is needed.

The notion of ‘goods and services’ in traditional economics is a reduction of the social relations among individuals—and of the individuals themselves—into commodifiable and fungible things. But *a commons-based economics raises the possibility of experiencing value through the practical relationships that arise among individuals, the resources of the world, and that which exists between people and the world*. This challenges the (neo)liberal orthodoxy of Immanuel Kant, who said that the non-empirical nature of metaphysics lies beyond immediate experience, whether external or internal. By revealing the connection between outer and inner experience, which are two completely different sources of knowledge, the commons offer analytic constructs which have previously been neglected, preventing economics from reflecting the real human condition. A commons-based economy arises from where we live and how and what we do. These articles propose a *common turn*—a theory of value bringing right understanding of the world without having to reach for a final explanation of its existence or rely on some parallel universe of economic abstractions. The delineation of this common worldview, arising from both outer and inner experience, provides the foundation of a new essentialism in economics and even suggests the outlines of a teleological structure (an emergent stage development sequence in economics will be explored in subsequent articles). It also provides a way of examining the premises of the Market State and understanding how the present social order may be transformed at all levels—local, state, interstate, regional and global—through institutions and policies of shared production and shared governance.

### Ancient Greece: Commons of the Ordinary World

Greek civilization before the time of Socrates (469-399 BCE) opens an important window into the Western history of ontology—the beingness of natural life. The Presocratic philosophers (approx. 625-430 BCE), like the sages of the East, contemplated the ultimate basis and essential nature of the external world. In seeking a universal originating principle to explain the duality of material life, the Presocratics were attuned to the active and open presence of things. For them, Being was a source of radical wonder and amazement at the sheer existence and experience of the natural world. Yet the Presocratics were also keenly aware of the growing movement toward conceptualization—the representation of being as ‘objects of experience’ or ideas realized through individual thinking. The Presocratic philosopher Heraclitus (535-475 BCE), famous for his teaching on the unity of opposites, summarized this balance between Being and Reason. “One must follow what is common,” he observed, “but though the word (Logos) is held in common, most men live as if they had a private understanding of their own.”

By the time of Plato (429-347 BCE), this balance had tilted in the direction of rational thought. The focus of Greek philosophy was turning from an emphasis on the presence of things to their representation as objects of knowledge. Philosophers began to teach that Being falsified the evidence given by the senses. What was important, they said, was detaching from nature and society in order to see both from an objective distance. This move toward

objectifying the contents of the mind resulted in the development of recorded history, analytic philosophy, organized bodies of knowledge and legal systems. The development of writing also became a tool of political command and communication, gradually giving rise to enclosures of property, privatization, mass trade and commerce.

Aristotle (384-322 BCE) was a witness to this mass societal transition—from the experiences, processes and relationships of phenomenological Being to the ideas, speculation and recorded observations of categorical Reason. As a student of Plato, he was able to look backward to the historical era of Being, yet he also anticipated the direction that Reason would take through the followers of Plato in philosophy, art, politics, law and economics. When Aristotle was teaching, the meaning of economics was not a significant topic of debate. Although the world’s first coins had been introduced in the Greek colony of Lydia about 685 BCE, Greece had only a modest monetary economy until the time of Plato and Aristotle. Customary and mercantile exchange existed side by side. There were few formal distinctions between the exchange practices of the ordinary world (the direct experience of the presence of things through gifts and simple barter) and that of the economic world (the indirect knowledge of the presence of things symbolized through coins).

Into this undifferentiated economic culture Aristotle put forward a unique metaphysics of wealth-creation—a set of guidelines which has continued to resonate with social thinkers down the centuries. His economic philosophy has influenced economic theorists ranging from Adam Smith and Georg Hegel to Karl Marx, John Maynard Keynes and Karl Polanyi—all of whom recognized the importance of defining wealth, human nature and social well-being in ordinary, rather than economic terms. Aristotle’s challenge of distinguishing the economic world from the common world was the basis of what Polanyi would later call (tragically) the ‘disembedding of the market’ from society. The underlying dichotomy that Aristotle identified—between the hard value of urban/merchant systems and the soft value of rural/agricultural systems—certainly wasn’t a new phenomenon in his day. The archaeological record traces this split in cultural values between town and country back at least to 3500 BCE in Mesopotamia and elsewhere. Yet Aristotle was the first to articulate these differences in a pre-modern theory of economic value. In many ways, his writing provides an indispensable bridge from the economies of pre-history to those of the future, documenting how the cultural orientation toward unity, harmony and connectedness in the exchange of things was rapidly giving way to an economics of division, fragmentation and analysis.

### Aristotle’s Economic Dualism: 2300 Years Later

In his treatise *Politics*, Aristotle observed that activities with different ends are different kinds of activities (Figure 1). *Value in use* is the qualitative use of a commodity (C) which is “peculiar and proper” to the object, like a chair upon which to sit or a coat that’s to be worn. This value arises from the articles of property that are

Figure 1

Aristotle's Kinds of Economic Activities

C (Commodities)	The limited stock of things that are useful in the family household or the greater community
M (Money)	The exchange of things for the limitless acquisition of currency

Figure 2

Aristotle's Forms of Wealth-Creation

C-M-C'	The self-restrained behavior of rule-based households or communities
M-C-M'	The unconstrained, spontaneous and self-generating market

needed by a family or the community. In contrast, *value in exchange* is the quantitative use of commodities which are to be traded with other people for money (M). Aristotle notes that these are not merely ethical distinctions but *different kinds of actions* that result in different forms of wealth-creation.

Taking these economic activities a step further, Aristotle proposed C-M-C' and M-C-M' as two forms of behavior in the creation of wealth (Figure 2). *C-M-C'* is the goal of getting a needed Commodity (C) through the exchange of Money (M), which results in the acquisition or consumption of the Commodity (C'). The C-M-C' cycle of wealth acquisition begins and ends with the stock of articles which are necessary for "good life and useful" in the household or community. In these types of exchanges, says Aristotle, "things that are useful are exchanged themselves and go directly for similar useful things." But, he cautions, "the amount of household property which is needed for a good life is not unlimited." When the item leaves the stage of circulation and enters the stage of acquisition or consumption, and there are enough things for citizens to live well and thrive, the C-M-C' process reaches its conclusion. True wealth, as a behavior that is a means to an end (the good life of citizens), starts and closes with the acquisition of useful things. Money serves only as a *measure of value*.

The second form of wealth acquisition, M-C-M', has an entirely different interpretation—money becomes the *medium of value*. Rather than the *qualitative accumulation* of useful things as in C-M-C', the *quantitative accumulation* of the means of exchange is the focus of M-C-M'. Money is both the beginning and end of this cycle: *M is the initial investment of Money, C is the Commodity in which it is invested for production or trade, and M' is the return of the Money plus an increase in its value through the profit gained from the sale of this commodity*. While he recognized that M-C-M' was a logical outcome of exchange in society, Aristotle also believed that the acquisition of currency for its own sake had to be moderated, for "there is no limit to the end it seeks." Instead of contributing to the virtues of sufficiency and well-being, unconstrained market exchange could lead to the vice of wanting more than is needed. Aristotle feared that if C is not treated as an end but as a means to M, the good life of society could be devalued as people lose sight of the significance of their wealth. Were money to become the ultimate object of people's desire, commercial culture would compromise all other social activities, subordinating community well-being to the goal of limitless acquisition

of currency. *Without linguistic and cultural distinctions between the ordinary world and the economic world, Aristotle warned, no legal and regulatory institutions could be developed to hold the market in check*. The idea of useful things for the benefit of the community would then be surpassed and replaced by the *utility* of things in the process of accumulating wealth.

During this period in Greek social history, as noted earlier, *the realm of preconscious being (which is prior to the rational division of subject and object) existed in a tenuous balance with the realm of cognitive knowing (which separates things into subject and object)*. Thus, in separating the common realm of being from the economic world of reason, Aristotle was presenting a new strategy for thinking about economics. In the ordinary world of *use value* (self-sufficiency, mutuality, respect), the end of exchange is the acquisition of a useful good to satisfy a need; but in the economic world of *exchange value* (material desire, rationality, utility), money is the only useful thing. Although this social/metaphysical balance-of-power no longer exists as it did in Ancient Greece, many theorists and analysts through the centuries have wondered how to recreate it (or something similar) out of the structures and practices of the commons. Altogether, these well-intentioned attempts at counterbalancing the preponderant weight of M-C-M' in society have had a checkered history. This is mostly because visionary economists and social thinkers have tended to focus on a single commons as their primary leverage point in this larger rebalancing. These alternative mechanisms for creating fungible subjective value are well known. *The social production of C-M-C' has been variously interpreted as the wealth of the household, family, community, charity, morality, religion, land, labor, cottage industries, appropriate technology, patents, complementary currencies, consumer demand, international development, foreign aid, debt forgiveness, natural capitalism, green finance, socially responsible businesses and public domain*. Each of these forms of value-creation has been claimed to represent a countercyclical principle or antithesis to the market system that will ultimately result in a synthesis of the abundance of common value in the world.

It appears, however, that Aristotle's theory of economic kinds has created a conceptual trap from which few theorists and policy makers have escaped. Analysts are still grappling with his basic dualism, which implies that the *qualitative experience* of life and living things through C-M-C' is the only way to counterbalance the *quantitative representation* of that experience as it is divided,

classified and commodified through M-C-M'. But *these binary definitions are the subjective and objective conditions of economy—not the single, whole world of experience*. C-M-C' cannot act as a check on the growing power of M-C-M' because ***these two forms of wealth creation were not part of an original unity in the first place***. As we can now see, Aristotle's simple formulation of C-M-C' (households and communities) does not include the vast range of other types of commons that exist, just as M-C-M' (money) characterizes only a narrow aspect of social activity. While both constitute vital principles of human organization, C-M-C' and M-C-M' are still sub-cycles in the larger cycle of Earth's systems.

By promoting this dual track (of quality and quantity) within a limited social/natural framework which does not derive from a greater unity, Aristotle unwittingly paved the way for a universal form of economic value focused solely on material things as the central human motivation. *Use value has now been conflated with utility*—an impersonal force distinct from Being which asserts its own 'being' by dividing the commons into subjective parts (public goods) and objective parts (private goods) in order to claim government enforcement and market society as the sum of those parts. Rather than comprising a unity, Aristotle's C-M-C' and M-C-M' constitute a subject-object dichotomy which has dehumanized economics. Today, *the things and activities deductively represented through the utilitarian value of the Market State deny the world in its wholeness*: the organic unity of society and nature, the ordinary realm of basic and concrete needs, the underlying preferences and moral values of people, the reality of human intersubjectivity, the affinity of consumers and producers, the potential of technology to alleviate poverty, the natural language of the commons, and the possibilities of the commons for creating a virtuous and sustainable life.

These contradictions must now lead to a greater synthesis. An economics based in ordinary reality would not be an either-or system of dogmatic methodological boundaries (quality/quantity, subject/object, inductive/deductive, deficit/surplus, austerity/stimulus). It would unify rather than divide. *It would not separate the concepts of things from our experience of them in their context and interrelatedness*. So how do we transcend the monocentric order which now exists between C-M-C' and M-C-M' and create this greater unity? Aristotle offers some compelling clues. Before returning to Aristotle, though, we must ponder the pre-currency world that existed before his time to better understand *common being* in the context and relationship between people and material things.

### Gift Commons: The Inalienability of Social and Natural Being

The years 800-200 BCE were a period of enormous transformation across ancient China, India, Persia, Palestine and Greece. As German philosopher Karl Jaspers marveled, the Axial Age was a time of great upheaval in many realms—scientific, intellectual, political, agricultural, cultural, philosophical and spiritual. These revolutionary dynamics also led to the introduction of coinage, widening trade, the increasing authority of the state and the

enclosure of common areas, resulting in the removal of people from their lands and means of subsistence. All of this destroyed the social cohesion of earlier gift cultures and the customary practices that were deeply woven into the lives of these people.

Some historians and free market theorists have questioned the importance—and even the existence—of gift economies. It's true that documentation of gift cultures is tricky since most of them didn't leave records. After all, the advent of writing was also the advent of post-gift cultures. Still, there is a large body of literature on gift economies in history. Max Weber and others explored the pre-market cultures of India, China and Judaism, many of which were gift-based. Anthropologists such as Marcel Mauss cited dozens of cultures which practiced gift exchange and our understanding of gift-giving in contemporary indigenous cultures is also extensive. Based on the research of evolutionary biologists, geneticists and neurologists, the gift economy appears to be as old as humanity itself. As an expression of spontaneous social organization—whether in fending off the harsh elements and dangerous predators or in providing food and shelter for the family and clan—*informal gift commons of subsistence and exchange were clearly practiced long before the development of categorical thinking, formal laws and state institutions*. So there is no point in getting lost in the empirical data about the existence of gift cultures. Communities have always been guided by presuppositions and beliefs. Every community sees individual actions within a larger social whole of ideas, norms and practices—whether real or ideal—and it is this shared understanding that allows people to develop their own social realities and thereby create value. The following overview of gift economies should be viewed in this light. The intent is not to marshal evidence but to get to the essence of the gift economy, both real and ideal.

A gift economy requires at least three people and the gift must circulate among them. A receiver gives a gift to the third party, rather than returning the gift to the original giver. Whatever one is given should not be kept but given away again—or if it is kept or consumed, then something of equal value should be passed on. *One can neither own a gift in isolation nor give a gift with the expectation of reciprocal benefit*. A different set of dynamics is at work. The recipient of a gift is in an open, attentive relationship with others, which creates a kind of existential emptiness. This involves experiencing a deep identity with the gift itself, and thereby with the donor and the next person to whom the gift will be given.

Mauss believed that when gifts are given away they hold a lingering element of the personality of the giver, which suggests that gift-giving is not an inalienable process. But this cannot be universally true. Sharing needn't involve personal sentiment or attachment. When we feel what others are feeling, we experience their being. Through empathy and intersubjectivity, one's own experiences and the experiences of others flow together in the same field without distinction. Since awareness of the self is not experienced as a separation from others, gift exchange does not take



place between us as separate selves. Indeed, personal concern with the feelings, wishes and needs of other people arises, not through our individuality as isolated entities, but because each of us is a physically instantiated self in a living body, sharing experiences with (and through) the bodies of others and the environment where we live. This is what makes the social benefit of gift exchange more valuable than its benefit to a single individual.

At the same time, the common being of the community, experienced through the exchange of gifts with other embodied individuals, *does not distinguish this increase in social benefit from the natural growth of living things. The exchange of gifts is identified both with social and natural growth* through fertility, vitality, liveliness, worth, abundance and creative potential for action—all of which enhance a giver’s capacities for production, the significance of the gift through its circulation, and the realization of community goodwill, well-being and social cohesion. This co-mingling of being with growth allows each member of the community to be nourished by a wholeness of spirit and power—of presence and meaning—that is greater than one’s own. It is *a form of shared experience that is irreducible to any other kind and irredeemable on any other terms.*

Aristotle’s dualism led economists to try to isolate particular economic kinds without understanding the whole. But gift exchange, as an expression of the body’s preconscious awareness of itself as a social and natural being, reminds a person of what is already whole before it is broken and divided into parts by the forces of materiality. Because the sharing of the gift flows from the embodied nature of human existence, there are no temporal divisions between the trustees and dispensers of gifts. Nor are society and nature seen as having spatial boundaries. Gift cultures are pure commons, holding a unique sense of historical time and space. What is essential to them is this *principle of inalienability*—the presence of value for oneself through others. Inalienability is the deep experience of material and immaterial things through the inexpressible worth of their shared existence. This is sometimes characterized in contrary terms—the implicit social understanding that some resources are too precious to human beings ever to be bought or sold. Indeed, since inalienability resists objectification, it is sometimes easier to describe inalienable value not by what it is, but by what it isn’t (Figure 3).

But there is no need to mystify the value of presence. All of us have direct experience with gift-giving. Friends exchange presents. Families share gifts of time, money, nourishment, shelter and expertise. We attend parties where there are many benefits of food and beverage, with entertainment freely provided. We donate blood or organs without reciprocation. Some groups give discarded items to anyone who wants them at no cost. Many inventors award their patents to the public domain. Wikipedia imparts knowledge free of charge. The digital world gives away information and services on a scale unimaginable a few decades ago. Yet because pure gift economies are *non-reciprocal*, they face enormous obstacles in a world of governmental restraints,

### Figure 3 Inalienable Value is not -

- dependent directly on communication
- dependent on reciprocity or reciprocal altruism
- dependent on utility or pleasure
- dependent on subjectivity or consensus
- subject to sanctions
- a form of monetary calculation or analysis
- a form of capital or investment for growth
- the establishment of agreements for immediate or future rewards
- the creation of commodities
- a function or consequence of something else
- a way of deriving value from information or other external sources

financial models and monetary systems, all of which are deeply rooted in utilitarian forms and structures of reciprocity (as detailed in the next article of this series). This makes a non-reciprocal system of exchange highly improbable as the basis of a new international economics. Still, *the principle at the heart of gift exchange—the inalienability of sharing—could indeed be adopted by the global economic system to rebalance and transform the super-institutions of market and state.* Before examining how this might work, we return to Aristotle’s economic framework and the hints of a greater dialectical unity which it offers.

### The Ontology of Common Property: Realizing Presence Value

It would appear that Aristotle was onto something fundamentally important, although he did not articulate it and his scheme was subsequently distorted. As he describes them, M-C-M’ and C-M-C’ are both polycentric systems—spontaneous, self-generating markets and rule-based, self-managed households and communities. Both involve what we now understand as time-tested metaphysical/biopolitical principles: *M-C-M’ expresses economic freedom and C-M-C’ expresses a just social order.* Aristotle also recognized that the unconstrained pursuit of either M-C-M’ or C-M-C’ on its own terms could lead to disorder. Since both are autonomous centers of decision-making, they are prone to imbalances. That’s why he stressed the importance of multiple centers of power in society to provide citizens with the incentives for self-organized, self-corrective change, thereby keeping these systems in balance.

During the past century or so, that dialectical quest for balance became crystallized in the distinction between business and finance as agents of M-C-M’, and civil society and the welfare state (or the social market) as primary sponsors of C-M-C’. Since the 1970s, however, this institutional relationship changed dramatically as business and government have joined in a monolithic union. Essentially, the Market State has now become a centralized transnational platform which determines both the procedural

rules and conceptual forms of polycentric order for the people and their commons. The metaphysical/biopolitical benefits of autonomous freedom and order—the unexpressed but implicit principles in Aristotle’s original formulation of M-C-M’ and C-M-C’—have disappeared into the formal operations and instrumental rhetoric of the Market State. The metamorphosis of the nation-state into a transnational utility has blurred the differences between private goods and public goods and erased our free and equal use of common goods. For the average person, the option of a meaningful and dynamic alternative (of common goods for the public good) has been removed, turning freedom and equality into abstracted ideals which are impossible to realize.

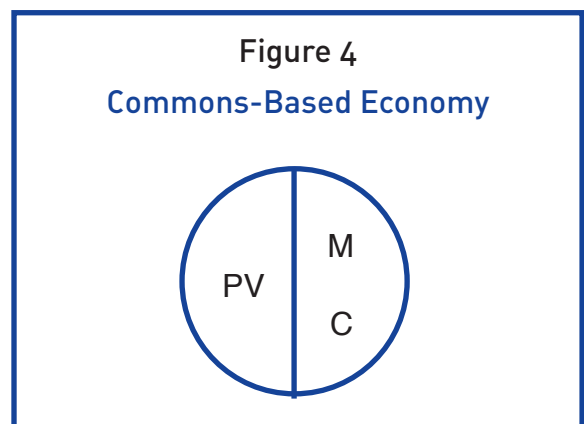
As innovative projects such as Ecological Economics, Degrowth and Genuine Wealth have noted, the field of economics is in dire need of metaphysical and ontological reconstruction. Our task is not to balance subjective reality (use value) with objective reality (exchange value), but to return to first principles—the metaphysical/biopolitical origins of the distinction between the common world and the economic world. Civilization can recover the ordinary sense of value that arises from the direct experience of Being by refocusing on the freedom and equality inherent in polycentricism—the spontaneous, self-correcting order of socially negotiated rules. This does not mean reinstating the practice of pure gift exchange across the world. But it will mean recovering its core meaning—the inalienable value of presence—through the experience of what is already right before us and within us, whether preexisting or created. This requires an economics which does not separate subjects from objects or persons from things. *The essence of the gift economy is not use value (C) or exchange value (M), but presence value (PV).* As a completely independent center of economic activity (from those outlined in Figure 1), presence value allows us to restore the context and wholeness of intersubjective experience through new forms of common action and practice. (Author’s note: I had previously called this *preservation value* in ‘The Commons of Mind, Life and Matter,’ *Kosmos*, spring/summer 2010, and ‘Interest Rates and Climate Change,’ *Kosmos*, fall/winter 2010, but now believe that presence value is a more accurate term.)

Here’s how presence value is expressed in a commons-based economy: *the users of resources become the co-producers of their own goods* (through mutual platforms, networks and technologies, peer-to-peer production, employee-operated businesses and cooperatives). When the motivations, skills, knowledge, ideas, learning and imagination of these users/producers are embodied directly in their collaborative activities, nature and society are fully present. As in a gift economy, natural and social growth are fused together through the realization of biopolitical labor. To sustain this process in social policies, rules and institutions, resource users/producers develop legal entities called commons trusts, alongside a plurality of other commons-based organizations in civil society and local government. Trusts are generally created to preserve depletable resources (natural, material), but many replenishable commons (natural, social, cultural,

intellectual, digital, solar) can also benefit from trusts to ensure their regeneration.

Trustees set a cap on the extraction or the use of a resource according to non-monetized, intergenerational metrics which express presence value, such as sustainability, quality of life and well-being. Having protected a commons safely for future generations, the trust may rent a proportion of the resources beyond the cap to the private sector or to state businesses and utilities for extraction and production. *The exchange value of M and the exchange process of M-C-M’ continue to operate for the benefit of free enterprise.* A percentage of this rent is taxed by government and redistributed to citizens as dividends or subsistence income, with emphasis on the poor and marginalized. Rental or user fees are also reinvested in the rehabilitation of depleted resources (such as land, rivers, oceans, atmosphere) and the enhancement of replenishable resources (arts, peacekeeping, collaborative knowledge, digital codes, solar energy). *The use value of C and the sufficiency cycle of C-M-C’ are thus maintained.*

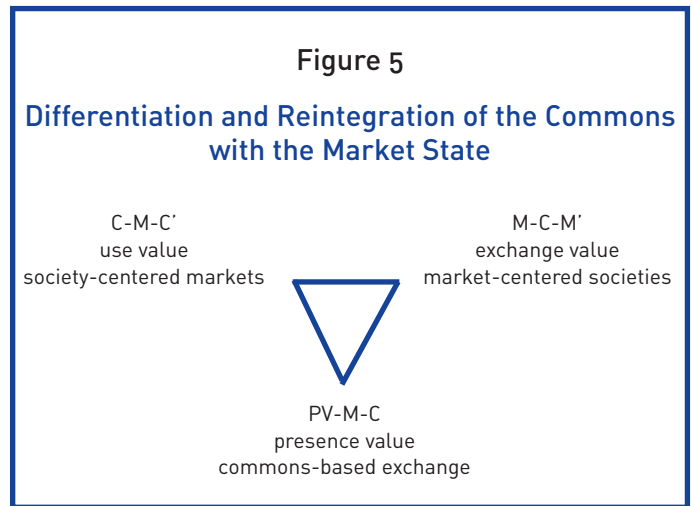
This entire process may be expressed as PV-[M-C-M’]-[C-M-C’]—or simply PV-M-C (Figure 4). It is a full-spectrum, commons-based exchange: *the commons are protected for the long-term through presence value (PV), the private sector profits from producing the resources which they rent through the exchange value of money (M), and the state taxes these rents to restore degraded commons, fund resource security and social dividends, and encourage free culture through the use value of commodities (C).* This transcends Aristotle’s economic dichotomy of (objective) exchange value and (subjective) use value. Of course, presence value is still an approximation—Being will always be greater and more elusive than our ability to develop technical or policy measures of ontological immediacy with ultimate precision. Yet by drawing upon a vast range of commons indicators, PV-M-C offers a way of tracking Being far more closely and comprehensively than today’s social and economic systems. ***Commons-based exchange gives society the practical capability of grounding sustainability, well-being and quality of life in Earth’s greater cycles of inalienable value—the experiences, processes and connectedness of people and their resources—before this ontological wealth and worth are alienated by the monetary standards imposed on society and nature through the sub-cycles of free enterprise and state order.***



## Reintegrating Unity and Division: The Common Turn

The first Axial Age led to the inclusive expression of common being through religion, the arts and culture. But it also resulted in the divisive rationality of privatization, property enclosures and utilitarian economics. If a new Axial Age is now dawning, a synthesis must emerge from the unity and division of the past. This new union can emerge only through a new expression of value. Yet we don't have to cast about looking for it: this value is already here, needing only to be named, understood and practiced. The commons may now be seen, at least in part, as a rediscovery of the principles of freedom and equality which are idealized but imperfectly expressed through modern free markets and state-enforced justice. Unlike the Market State, however, the commons cannot be coordinated by some ultimate authority exercising control through a unified command structure. *The commons are a third dynamic—arising from the shared values and meanings of people's life-experiences—which includes but transcends the market and state.*

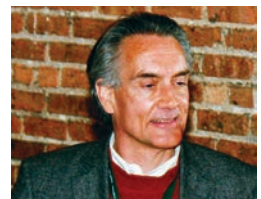
The commons are a spontaneous order where agents act independently through multiple centers of decision-making, making corrective adjustments with one another through a general system of rules. The presence value of PV-M-C grounds this polycentric order in both the *freedom of the individual* (the personal capacity for decision-making, deliberation, incentives, opportunities and action) and the *equality of the group* (where individuals are already nested in a social hierarchy which also makes choices, has incentives and takes action). The recovery of individual and group sovereignty enables society to realize that commons-based exchange is both the ground of our actions and the result of the process. Indeed, the value of the commons arises from self-managed communities actively participating in the production and management of resources for themselves and future generations, as well as the great inheritance by those communities of the accumulative capacities of the Earth and earlier generations. The commons are thus an *emergent phenomenon*—the ontological production of shared meaning and experience through interdependence, cooperation and trusteeship. Yet the structures of these productive contexts and relationships also have their origins in a reality that predates the dominant forms of the market and state, which means they are *pre-eminent*. This is the **Common Turn**: *when the essential predicates of economic thought are no longer set apart from everyday language and experience, the things of the*



*ordinary world will be present to society both through their interconnectivity (in value) and their particularity (in fact), bringing us back to the experiential world of the commons.*

From the perspective of social and natural history, unity generates separation and division, which leads to a splintering of the original unity. A new unity can emerge only out of the previous forms of unity and division. Today, the assumptions of market-based value in economics are radically disjointed from the common sense of people and the ontological forms of the commons. To recover the human and natural wealth that has been lost in the historical transition from society-centered markets to market-centered societies and create a new synthesis, we must differentiate and reintegrate the commons with the market and the state (Figure 5). Commons-based exchange will enable us to address the causes of separation within society and within ourselves, healing the disparities between society and nature. So there is great reason for hope in spite of the present despair. Before very much longer, planetary civilization will outgrow the shackling suppositions and disunities of utilitarian economics. Then we will be free to choose our own values and decide for ourselves what makes life worth living.

**James Bernard Quilligan**, a longtime activist in international development, is co-founder and managing director of Global Commons Trust. Part Two of this series, 'Common Trusting,' will appear in *Kosmos*, spring/summer 2012.



## ANNOUNCING... A Charter for an Axial Age

If ours is indeed an age of value shift, no dimension of that epochal change is more important than that which is underway in the world's great religious and spiritual communities.

*The Association for Global New Thought (AGNT), the Interreligious Engagement Project (IIEP21), and the International Interreligious Peace Council announce the 2012 Charter Dialogues, to be held October 14-21, 2012 in Rome and Florence, Italy.*

Religious and spiritual leaders will converge with groups and individuals working for global peace, justice, and sustainability. Together, they will shape "A Charter for Engaged Spirituality in the 21st Century" and begin to develop initiatives for its implementation.

The event will help to set the stage for the next decades of evolutionary activism, and for a 'Second Axial Age' in religion and spirituality.

NGOs, activists and change agents should watch *Kosmos* for more information and/or contact Barbara Fields ([Barbara@agnt.org](mailto:Barbara@agnt.org)) or Jim Kenney ([jim@seachanges.net](mailto:jim@seachanges.net)) to learn more about the event, registration, travel, accommodations etc. Visit the Charter Dialogues web page [www.agnt.org/charter-dialogues](http://www.agnt.org/charter-dialogues).