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Toward a Common Theory of Value: Common Knowing

by James Bernard Quilligan

Our Brain Hemispheres: Decoding the Epistemology of Economics

The articles in this series examine the meaning of value in economics. Parts One and Two considered Aristotle’s distinction between C-M-C’ (the possession of household Commodities, which aims at getting useful things to sustain life) and M-C-M’ (the ownership of wealth, which aims at getting Money by converting commodities into profit). These studies found that C-M-C’ and M-C-M’ do not express a material unity of self and whole. For one thing, the commodity form is not a natural or stable unit since there are many areas where commodities do not exist, such as gift economies (like Wikipedia) or the exchange of aboriginal modes of property (like sharing with friends). For another, the money form—which requires an individual’s integration into the marketplace through the general equivalence of currency value—is by no means an absolute form of shared experience or Being.

Despite its flaws, Aristotle’s structure is still helpful in differentiating the ordinary world of useful things and use value from the economic world of money and exchange value. This distinction has remained viable since Aristotle first introduced it in *Politics* in 350 BCE. His articulation of value in natural language has resonated across generations, inspiring non-market ideas from economists as diverse as Adam Smith, Karl Marx and John Maynard Keynes. Part Three broadens this inquiry by considering the epistemology which underlies Aristotle’s framework. It analyzes how our economic knowledge is predicated on the ways we know.

Most of us have been taught that the human brain connects the physical world with our perceptions and values. But do we know how the brain expresses consciousness or mind? Our neurological and neuropsychological understanding of the brain is scarcely sixty years old, yet brain science is already generating new perspectives on human knowledge and behavior. Analysts such as Iain McGilchrist (*The Master and His Emissary*) and Daniel Pink (*A Whole New Mind*) have studied the voluminous research on brain hemispheres and arrived at startling conclusions about history, philosophy, culture and business. It’s time to apply this understanding to economics. The thesis is simple.

Our present ways of knowing are imbalanced, which has skewed the economic system and reduced the commons of the ordinary world into commodities and money. Since all people have two brain hemispheres which process complementary views on the nature of reality as

a whole and as a part, a foundation exists for economic knowledge that is both universal and pluralistic. The development of this epistemology will reunite the economy with the commons (Figure 1).

In *gender* terms, differences in human values have been known from the mists of time and clinical brain studies confirm this traditional wisdom. Women tend to have greater capacity for language, communication and bonding. Men tend to have greater capacity for mathematics, spatial abilities and aggression. Theorists like Riane Eisler (*The Chalice and the Blade*) have traced such variances in human characteristics and preferences to biological gender, yet female-male differences are not the cause of the divergent functions and capacities within our brain hemispheres. Many differences in human value exist in individuals regardless of gender. Clearly, there is more to consider.

Figure 1

How Does the Brain Process Knowledge?

HEMISPHERE	PART & WHOLE	RELATIONSHIP
Right	Whole as a context for the part	Personal, subjective, unstructured
Left	Part as a category of the whole	Impersonal, objective, structured
Together	Unity of the whole and part	Connected and interrelated

In *epistemological* terms, human beings see distinctions in value stemming from the internal, subjective world and the external, objective

world. From the perspective of the right hemisphere, we recognize the particularity of things through interrelationship. The intuitive right hemisphere perceives the world in an unstructured way, opening across boundaries of space, time and identity. It experiences reality as a great flowing network of interconnection and wholeness, too vast and uncertain to comprehend through a fusion of subject and object. But when this sense of unity is captured by the logical left hemisphere, it is divided into cognitive bits or items for their organization, manipulation and use. The act of separating these parts from one another and from the whole (of society or nature) creates divisions between subject and object. From the perspective of the left hemisphere, we see the world as an orderly structure, forming predictable boundaries of self, thought and identity. This makes the knowledge of the left hemisphere inert and static, unable to know the whole as a precognitive or supercognitive stream of existence in the same way as the right hemisphere.

Such polar differences do not suggest that our brain functions are hopelessly divided or incoherent. The brain is not a mechanical system of divisible parts but a way for the mind to operate in the physical realm with a unity of consciousness. Functioning together as a unit, the two brain hemispheres are vital in our functioning as individuals. Except in cases of extreme neurological disorder, everyone uses both inductive (right hemisphere-generated) and deductive (left hemisphere-generated) forms of

thought. Yet, in examining the interdependent functions and capacities of the brain hemispheres, we also find a *normal inclination in individuals to focus more on one side of the brain*. Indeed, we all have and use both hemispheres in our mental activities, but tend to favor one over the other.

In *community* terms, human beings project their beliefs, values and choices into the world according to the brain's capacities for processing the perceived differences between things. This manifestation of human consciousness through our social structures and culture has been going on for countless millennia. One of the ways that early civilizations clashed over the expression of the right and left hemispheres concerned water and food. Roughly three thousand years ago, the development of irrigation channels, aqueducts and agricultural surpluses began lifting the masses from subsistence forms of living. A new order of social organization and commerce spread beyond the towns and governing centers which had developed these new hydrological and agricultural techniques and other innovations through left hemisphere rationality.

This posed a challenge for tribal and agrarian peoples who maintained a more simple, instinctive existence through the right hemisphere. Gradually, many of these cultures were confronted with the introduction of writing, literacy, specialization, division of labor, markets, urbanization, central governments, bureaucracy, law codes, military organizations and religious systems. Those who lived in gift economies and rural settings, where right hemisphere reality was experienced as an ever-changing flow of consciousness, retained a different awareness of time than those who embraced these more advanced forms of social organization. The historical memory of tribal and agrarian communities was not of external, political events but of collective events within their culture. Their knowledge was centered more on personal relationships than on things. They did not recognize distinctions in social and ecological systems. Culture and Earth were of one piece, without boundaries.

In *cultural* terms, these discrepancies between collective and individual consciousness have played out on a much broader scale. People in Eastern civilizations tend to express ways of knowing and valuing which flow from the right hemisphere, while those in the West focus more on the left hemisphere. These are huge generalizations, of course, yet they capture the metaphysical distinctions elaborated by FSC Northrop in his classic study, *The Meeting of East and West*. Although broadly different in their views and structures, Taoist China, monist India and monotheistic Egypt, Persia, Judea, Phoenicia and Carthage were all civilizations with a pluralistic vision of individual being and social harmony. The ancient cultures of Asia—bordering with Africa at the Nile River and with Europe at the Aegean Sea—held a vision of the One in the Many. They recognized the endless diversity of the phenomenal world within the prior unity that underlies everything and connects the individual pieces. For the right hemisphere, the world is not comprised of multiplicity, difference or quantifiable things. There is no division. Concepts and experience are one. The part and whole are united.

This is in sharp contrast to the West, which sees reality as the Many in the One. Emphasizing reason and the individual, Western culture tries to maintain an observational distance from the

world in order to isolate, record and analyze the nature of things. Rather than experiencing the presence of reality as an unstructured flow of consciousness, interrelationship and connectedness, the left hemisphere focuses, categorizes and represents these perceptions into a cognitive model of the world. Human perceptions now become the objects of experience—separate, concrete and predictable units, requiring no reintegration with unity. For Western civilization, the parts are permanently detached from the whole.

Things Over Persons: The Problem of Democratic Materialism

In *historical* terms, the dominance of the left brain over the right brain was marked by Alexander the Great's conquest of Asia Minor and Persia from 334-324 BCE, which established an empire reaching from the Adriatic Sea to the Indus River. This was a turning point in many ways. Greece's victory had a major impact on history, politics, society, culture and the evolution of consciousness. Like Persia, Presocratic Greece had emphasized the oneness of a higher reality which transcends individual differences. But the defeat of the Persian Empire, which ended the monotheistic society and culture established by Zoroastrianism, paved the way for the unchallenged rise of individualism in Greece. The Greeks established a democratic society which aimed at sharing wealth with the lower classes, increasing education, developing the arts and fostering community life. Instead of creating a new balance between self and whole, however, the Greek system stressed the material development of the individual. Democratic materialism focused on rationality as a means for the survival of the physical body, rather than the growth of the creative, spiritual mind.

After Greece was conquered in 168 BCE, this experiment in individualism became a central objective of the Roman Empire. Ultimately, democratic materialism, with its emphasis on things over persons, led to the development of liberal capitalism. Britons and Americans, like the Greeks and Romans before them, emphasize the independent choice, privacy and rights of the individual over the mutual welfare, harmony and duties of society. With the values of Western liberal democracy now so influential in the world, yet heavily resisted across large parts of Asia, *the question is how to develop a more complex basis for economics which marries Western modernity with Eastern tradition, unifying self and whole* (Figure 2).

In *economic* terms, Aristotle was attempting to explain these very cultural and historical differences between the social good and individual rights when he proposed C-M-C' and M-C-M' (Figure 2). This early vision of economic democracy, adducing how the ordinary world and the economic world are conjoined, expressed Aristotle's intuitive sense of balance between the right and left sides of the brain. *C-M-C' replicates the inductive reasoning process which moves right-left-right, and M-C-M' captures the process of deductive reasoning which moves left-right-left.*

C-M-C' (exchanging a commodity for money in order to obtain another commodity) tries to demonstrate how society generates an economic benefit for all individuals. It describes the process of human attention moving from the broad awareness of Being (the household commons of sufficiency) to Reason (the will to survive and prosper by generating money) and back again to Being. Centered on the meaningful articles which support

Figure 2

Envisioning A New Basis for Economic Knowledge

	LEFT HEMISPHERE INFLUENCE	RIGHT HEMISPHERE INFLUENCE
Material	Self	Whole
Gender	Male	Female
Epistemological	Rational / Deductive Mind	Intuitive, Instinctive / Inductive Mind
Community	Center / Town	Periphery / Rural
Cultural	West	East
Historical	Greece-Rome-Britain-US	China-India-Persia-Egypt
Economic	Money / M-C-M'	Household Goods / C-M-C'
Foundational	Constituted Order	Spontaneous Order
Institutional	Self-Regulating Freedom of the Market	Rule-Based Harmony Enforced by Government
Ideological	Freedom and Choice	Harmony and Equality
Political	Market State	Commons
Social	Individual Rights	Collective Good
Philosophical	Emergent Forms of Property	Pre-Existing Forms of Property
Ordinary	Co-Production: <i>Spontaneous Decision-Making and Action</i>	Co-Governance: <i>Rule-Based Behavior and Norms</i>

domestic life, C-M-C' has some awareness of the nature of things as they actually exist—the context of the whole (the One in the Many) before it is broken into parts. But C' is still a highly mediated form of unity, including only one type of commons.

M-C-M' (the relinquishing of money for a commodity in order to obtain more money) tries to portray how individuals improve themselves economically within society. It begins in Reason, reflects on Being, and ends back in Reason. It is focused on a part (the self-interested pursuit of money) after the whole (the sufficient world of household goods) has been interrupted by rationality (the financial accounting of the family commons). But this is not an expression of the pluralism in society (the Many in the One). M-C-M' views the whole as the sum of the parts in order to divide reality into single, categorical units of money—measures which did not originally exist in the greater unity of society or nature. M' is simply a mediated part of the whole, and, like C' above, just one aspect of the commons.

Obviously, this is an imperfect whole. As Parts One and Two indicated, the Greek paradigm of household sufficiency and money-making does not express the broader coherence which the Ancient Chinese, Indians, Persians, Egyptians and Hebrews had envisioned in their balance between religion and science and the metaphysical unity of mind and body. Aristotle's economic universe of *household goods* and *money* was flawed because *neither could be de-commodified back into commons*—the greater synthesis of self, society and nature. Rather, the commodification of society led to the commodification of the individual and the imbalanced conditions of a separative material existence. The Greco-Roman adoption of C-M-C' and M-C-M' has resulted in an epistemology of mind over body (or intellect over intuition and instinct), which discredits the significance of shared reality and disconnects human beings from one another and the Earth. In essence, *Western individualism—the duality of materiality and spirituality—suppresses the individual creative act of seeking and acknowledging the deeper value of the whole.*

Self and Whole: An Ever-Elusive Unity

In *foundational* terms, the right and left brain hemispheres of human beings externalize their conscious ideas, preferences and beliefs directly onto the social order. Over thousands of years, generation after generation of people have projected these interior values into the outer world through their social activities, decisions, rules and organizations. In *The Intellectual Crisis in American Public Administration* and *Polycentricity and Local Public Economies* (ed. Michael McGinnis), political scientist Vincent Ostrom developed a theory to explain the nascent stages of this process, when these core values are initially expressed through the commons. (Ostrom was the husband of commons scholar Elinor Ostrom.) Building on Michael Polanyi's seminal book, *The Logic of Liberty*, Ostrom showed that human institutions are a kind of collective repository or memory of the social patterns

and norms that emerge from the commons through communities of individuals. It is through these values and practices that we become what we are and define our identity. Based on this insight, he distinguished two essential types of social order:

spontaneous order—comprised of mutually adjusting, unstructured and pluralistic decision-making

constituted order—comprised of centrally organized, structured and homogeneous rule-guided behavior

While he was evidently unaware of human brain dynamics, what Ostrom touched upon were the foundational values and practices rooted in human knowledge and being. These are the basic patterns of social order found in community relationships prior to the creation of formal economic and political structures. At this early phase in the integration of individual and social consciousness, ***spontaneous order is a right hemisphere expression of the fluid, undifferentiated and uncertain immediacy of existence. Constituted order is a fixed, categorical and predictable representation of the world by the left hemisphere.*** Over time, these foundational values and practices of spontaneous and constituted order evolve into the formal institutions of markets and governments. But something interesting occurs during this transformational stage which Ostrom did not recognize. As the autonomous forms of social order are formalized into economic and political institutions, ***spontaneous order and constituted order switch their polarities.***

Since both brain hemispheres are continuously involved in the dialogue between self and whole, our economic and political institutions are not singular projections of either the right or left hemisphere, but a mixture of both. This interplay between the hemispheres is clearly engaged when the formal institutions of economic exchange and political regulation are developed through social negotiation and consensus agreement. In society, just as in the individual, the right and left hemispheres are

continuously trading information, whether through deduction (left-right-left) or induction (right-left-right).

As deductive reasoning moves from the part to the whole and back to the part, the left brain takes the right brain's vision of the spontaneous, unstructured flow of reality and translates this back into the left hemisphere. *The foundational values of spontaneous order become anchored in the left hemisphere, which now emphasizes the order of the market* (the dynamic, self-generating process of mutual adjustment which is independent of unified command structures). This becomes identified as the **self-regulating freedom of the marketplace**.

Similarly, as inductive reasoning moves from the whole to the part and back to the whole, the right brain takes the left brain's cognition of the constituted structure of the world and incorporates this into the right hemisphere. *The foundational values of constituted order are thus anchored in the right hemisphere, which now emphasizes the order of government* (the structural boundaries of social order and cooperation involving constitutional restraint or enforcement of property rights and contracts). This becomes identified as the **rule-based harmony enforced by government**.

In this way, markets and governments include both the dominant and subdominant characteristics of each of the brain's hemispheres. Hence, the idea of the market is not a simple projection of the left hemisphere, since the right brain's emphasis on spontaneous flow is subdominant in the left hemisphere projection of self-organizing markets. *This is why advocates of free markets are committed to the dynamic freedom expressed by the right hemisphere, but focus it through the individualist values of the left hemisphere*. Likewise, the idea of government is not a direct projection of the right hemisphere, since the left brain's emphasis on constituted order is subdominant in the right hemisphere projection of rule-based governments. *This is why advocates of government are committed to the structural boundaries expressed by the left hemisphere when emphasizing the collectivist values of the right hemisphere*.

In ideological terms, it's evident that modern political culture has formed around these conscious alignments. However, at this advanced stage of popular consciousness, the change in polarity from the foundational level to the institutional level is complete and the historical transference of value from the foundational to the institutional no longer seems relevant and is largely forgotten. As though the commons did not exist and the political spectrum were naturally bifurcated, the political right now promotes the individual values of *freedom* and *choice*, while the political left stresses the collective values of *harmony* and *equality*.

In an evolutionary sense, these conscious aims—pro-market conservatives with left hemisphere ideals and pro-government progressives with right hemisphere ideals—would seem to point toward a greater institutional balance in society. Indeed, from the pre-institutional perspective of the commons, both sides have similar purposes: *the political right's commitment to conserve natural creation from progressive forces is virtually the same as the political left's commitment to defend collective property from private enclosure*. This has many implications for the development of personal, social and environmental pluralism within a context of holism. The commons are a decentralized unity which is realized

when *the integration of self* (the inner balance of the left and right hemispheres) *with society* (the outer balance of the political right and left) *results in a broader integration of self and society with nature*.

Why, then, has civilization failed to develop societies in which the individual serves the collective and the collective serves the individual? The struggle to define individual identity and expression in relation to the whole is vitally important for human beings. Yet history shows that no form of collectivism has ever been universal enough—whether through spiritual inclusion, political meaning or geographical scope—to ensure the social harmony and equality necessary for the advancement of individual freedom and choice. So it's not surprising that proponents of individualism, who emphasize the free will of self-interest and personal incentives, hold a deep mistrust of collectivity. Countless societies which have envisioned the egalitarian unity sought by the right hemisphere have become authoritarian, leading to monstrous instances of 'unity'. Throughout human history, social totalities of many forms—monotheism, theocracy, oligarchy, dictatorship, fascism, communism and capitalist monopoly—have been deeply oppressive.

Why have these endless attempts to manage social structures in the interest of group cohesion turned so disastrous? A sense of cosmic order or organic unity gave many traditional societies a way of understanding the differences between social groups and also bound them together as one. Some, like ancient Persia and Egypt, were benevolent monarchies which attempted to balance religion, art, science and government, yet ended up creating a divisive aristocracy through their religious commitment to unity. The ancient Hindu culture envisioned spiritual unity but devolved into a caste system. The early Hebrew vision of wholeness was splintered by its rivalrous tribes. Both Christianity and Islam began as cultures of peace and unification but transformed into state religions with militant followers.

Collectivist civilizations have generally ignored the motivations and preferences of their citizens and failed to create personal incentives for people to grow and develop through a sense of self and individual choice. The history of both the East and West is a sad chronicle of the centralization of authority by a righteous leadership that seeks to do good through power, the adoption of personal ownership by an elite class seeking wealth, and the use of violence and force to achieve their particular version of social convergence and cultural evolution. Again and again, the very knowledge that generates institutional order for the benefit of society has also resulted in ideologies of political constraint which destabilize and repress that order. As world history shows, these 'cohesive' societies have generated mass starvation, social and labor inequality, slavery, sexism, religious hatred, crusades, holy wars, colonialism, imperialism, world wars, holocausts and ecocide.

The human passion for liberty and democracy is deeply inspired by the desire to limit tyrannical governments, which have betrayed the ideals of collectivism and made unity into something to be feared. The left hemisphere conceives of individuals as discrete parts vaguely originating from something larger, yet staunchly refuses to recognize the significance of the collective as a responsible form of unity. This has left society without the possibility of meaningful cohesion between the individual and the

collective. Rather than contribute to a genuine vision of economic and political integration, individual freedom and choice are constantly casting shadows and an abiding fear of the whole.

Maintaining the Whole as the Sum of its Parts: Illusions of Market Society

In *political* terms, we are now witnessing the latest form of oligarchy, the *Market State*. This is an apparent unity which holds together the rivalrous interests of business and government. Since the 1970s, *the Market State has presented itself as an indivisible union of self-regulating freedom and rule-based harmony*. This emerging order promises to increase market freedom and choice by enhancing our economic opportunity as consumers and investors. At the same time, banks and corporations are rapidly bending national constitutions and legislatures to their will to create greater social coherence. Government is to have no duties except for national defense, protection of property and the dismantling of barriers to business.

This commercial moism seems to integrate all social and political meaning into an expression of universal order, giving the appearance of synthesizing the world of human experience. But Market Society is no improvement on democratic materialism (which is why it's a mistake to call it neo-liberalism). Market Society is based on a singular understanding: that every value is commensurate with every other value through the market-place. This self-referring market is seen as the ultimate systemic truth, while partial truths of freedom and harmony are converted into an idealized union of the top-down structures of supply-demand in business and power-consent in government. Freedom, choice, harmony and equality are now simply a cover for the appearance of engaged citizenship and the aggregate good of individuals. By equating a person's perception of reality with their integration into the system, personal consciousness vanishes into the sum of the individual members. It's not just that money replaces useful things as wealth, as Aristotle warned. The absolute, large-scale, monocentric systems of Market Society *reduce the commons to commodities and stifle all integrative forms of reconciling the individual self with the whole of the living world*.

What has actually vanished into this cloud of centralized control are *the self-organizing community practices of spontaneous*

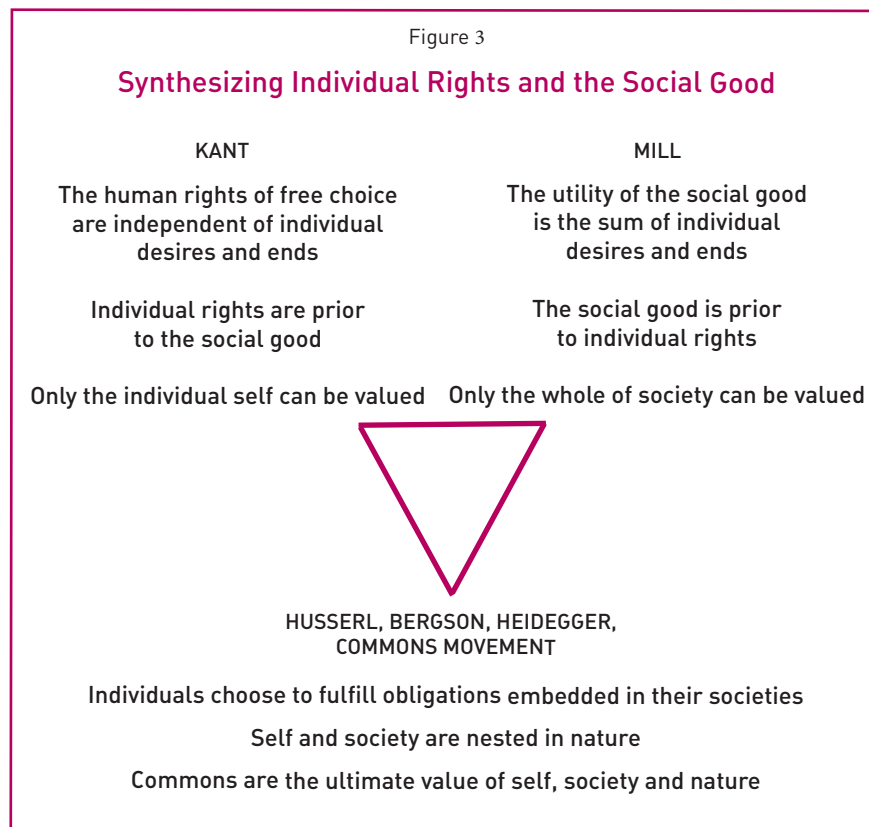
decision-making and rule-based behavior—those shared values and experiences that were deeply rooted in the commons long before they were absorbed into the operations and ideologies of Market Society. These are the core values of autonomy and pluralism which were originally projected onto our shared public spaces by the brain's left and right hemispheres. As Ostrom suggests, they are *the foundational values of social order which create spontaneous decision-making and rule-based behavior from the ground of self, community and nature*, before becoming institutionalized in markets and governments.

To regenerate these basic forms of community-based practice, we must first dispel the illusion of consumer utopia and recognize that the whole is not the sum of the parts: *the market does not represent the individual nor does government represent the collective*. The science of complex systems shows that the qualities of the parts are transformed only when the whole is realized. That's why a new unity of living things is required beyond the singular order of Market Society. It's also why people are now anticipating a 'third way' beyond markets and governments. We yearn for the foundational values which express the interrelatedness of human and natural life and which can arise only through our commons.

Phenomenology of the Commons: Reunifying Division and Unity

In *social* terms, the international discourse

on political order is dominated by Western thought (Figure 3). Liberalism's historical dichotomy—the individual expressing market values and the collective expressing state values—has become a nearly universal frame of reference (although liberal ideals are still deeply contested in Asia). Immanuel Kant maintained that individuals should be treated as ends in themselves, not as a means for the happiness of others. For Kant, *individual rights are prior to the good of society*. Since we are all separate individuals with aims, interests and conceptions of the social good, every person should be free to choose their own values and ends, allowing a similar liberty for other people. In contrast, John Stuart Mill wanted to ensure the will of the majority through 'the greatest good for the greatest number.' For Mill, *the social good is prior to individual rights*. In this view, the State should aggregate each person's values—maximizing every individual's freedom of choice—into the single will of society.



Evolutionary, cultural and technological forces have now begun to transform the duality of Kant's individualism and Mill's collectivism. From the preservation of rivers, forests and indigenous cultures to the creation of knowledge, open source platforms and social networks, *resource users are becoming the producers of their own resources and generating new forms of value.* This emerging commons society does not make individual rights more important than the common good or common good more important than individual rights. It holds that every person takes part in a larger life, neither entirely isolated nor entirely socialized, with roles that are defined by the community. *Individual rights are realized only through the ethical norms that already exist in the collective good embodied in the commons.* Aristotle had an early vision of this 'public personhood' in his concept of the *polis* or city-state. Hegel also held that the ultimate means of public life was expressed in the State. Both philosophers believed that the highest and most complete moral existence is experienced only through our preexisting obligations and rights as members of a greater community life. Yet this view is more of an institutional ideal than a public expression of the norms and practices of spontaneous decision-making and rule-based behavior. *The city-state and State have never fully represented the highest means and ends of society as a true community of individuals practicing the self-regulating freedom and rule-based harmony of their commons.*

In *philosophical* terms, this part-whole dualism between individualized consciousness and collective consciousness came to an end with the 20th century school of *phenomenology*. Building on the work of the 19th century idealists and existentialists, Schopenhauer, Hegel and Nietzsche, the phenomenologists reconnected with the nonpolar wisdom of the Presocratics and the ancient philosophers of the Far East. Edmund Husserl emphasized the role of empathy and intersubjectivity between embodied beings who are actively engaged in the world. He recognized that the field of shared experience is generative, giving rise to being and meaning. Henri Bergson and Maurice Merleau-Ponty maintained that the human body mediates between consciousness and the world through complex interrelationship and engagement. Since individual experience is deeply embedded in the context of the world, no objects or bodies are independent of other objects or bodies. Martin Heidegger also examined the realization of the authentic self through one's shared potentiality with others. The human being is thrown into the world of immediate but temporal existence with conscious intentionality, creating the possibility of spaces and clearings where Being can arise. It is through these common spaces that we experience the interconnectedness of division and unity and discover the sense of what it is to be human, both individually and with others.

The phenomenologists were the intellectual forebears of the commons movement. (I'll save the legacy of the structuralists, post-structuralists and postmodernists for future articles.) By using the mind's image of its own processes to view the world as it actually exists, these philosophers demonstrated how to transcend the subject-object and ideal-real dualities which distort the pre-existing nature of the whole. Nearly a century after this breakthrough work, the commons movement has embraced the same vision: *when our biophysical bodies are involved in a mutual activity to preserve, produce, manage,*

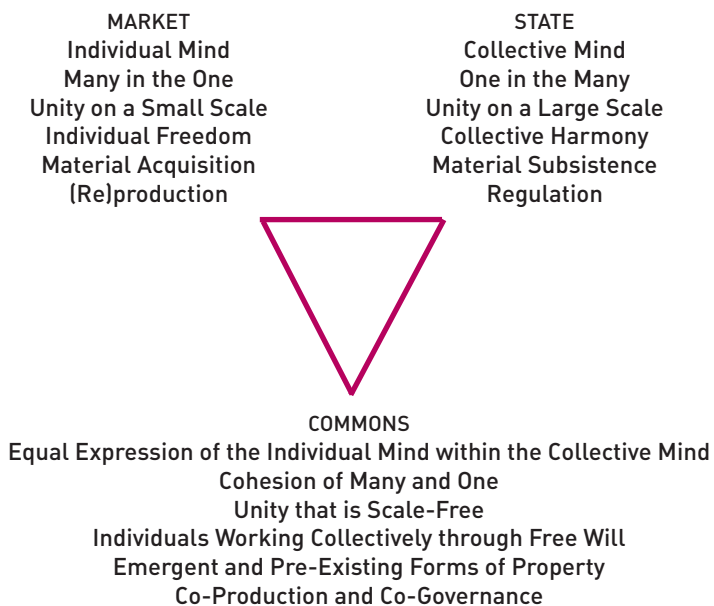
access or use a resource, the inner realm of the individual is united with the outer world of society through the greater whole of nature.

The commons—consisting of our material, natural, genetic, social, cultural, intellectual and digital resources—are either created through current practices or are already present before the activity of maintaining them through our practices. Because they enable us to recover an understanding of the ordinary meaning of things, these *emergent and pre-existing forms of property* are precisely the epistemological and ontological distinctions that have been missing in Western economic and social thought since the days of Plato and Aristotle. At the same time, as Pankaj Mishra observes in *From the Ruins of Empire*, the nations of Asia, which have now emerged from the shadows of Oriental despotism and Euro-American imperialism, are also searching their own cultural and intellectual heritage for a new foundation for economics. Through the Taoist, Vedic, Sufist and other traditions, they, too, are rediscovering the commons (Figure 4).

In *ordinary* terms, the right hemisphere generates the basic patterns of *rule-based behavior and norms* for society through inductive reasoning from the self to the whole. Similarly, the left hemisphere generates the basic patterns of *spontaneous decision-making and action* for individuals through deductive reasoning from the whole to the self. As Vincent Ostrom maintained, these generative forms of consciousness refer not to government or business, but to their original practice in the community: *the co-governance and co-production of a resource by its users and producers.* These self-organizing practices recapture the foundational values of constitutive order and spontaneous order which were suppressed by their institutionalization under the rule-based harmony of government and the self-regulating freedom of the market.

Figure 4

Transforming Market Society



Co-governance involves the rule-based behavior and norms of groups in preserving and maintaining their commons. This enables communities to supervise and sustain these resources and ensure equitable ways of sharing their uses and benefits. *Co-production* involves the spontaneous decision-making and action by individuals in the creation (or re-creation) of a resource, using skills and learning discovered in relationship with others. This enables people to find new identity and significance by sharing information, seeking consensus-based solutions and distributing the benefits that arise from the use of these commons.

Co-governance and co-production allow us to generate our own reality in reference to a shared community of understanding, value and custom. This is where the original meaning of harmony and freedom is to be found. Each of us has roles which are embedded in the accountability structures of our communities. We recover the meaning of community and citizenship—which has been lost through the bureaucratic state and the corporate economy—by focusing on the management and production of the commons. Our commoning activities may thus be seen as the devolution of the harmony and equality of the state and the freedom and choice of the market. *Co-governance and co-production are the depolarized forms of rule-based harmony and self-regulating freedom which our future actions seek to sustain, expressing the indivisibility and abundance which underlie self, society and nature.*

When resource users become directly involved in the process of governance and production of a resource, they form a meeting place for pluralistic groups, the manifestation of their evolutionary potentials and the emergence of innovative forms of value. This recovery of the natural value which already exists in the social good is what Aristotle tried to capture by stressing the usefulness of things (C-M-C') over their ownership (M-C-M'). But he missed the intersubjective context and unity involved in maintaining and regenerating these shared public spaces through the self-organizing patterns of rule-based behavior and spontaneous decision-making. Thanks to the phenomenologists, we now recognize that individuals are embodied beings sharing the values, meanings, rights and obligations of their life-experiences with other embodied beings through the governance and production of a commons.

Resolving the Conflict Over Value: The Knowledge of our Living Bodies

From the right and left hemispheres of our brains, we project ideas and values into the activities, institutions and public life of society. But these projections are not uniformly distributed or manifested. There is a basic inclination on the part of different individuals, communities, nations and civilizations to affirm the ideas and values of one hemisphere over the other. Right hemisphere cultures emphasize inductive thought, creativity and higher consciousness which reach to a greater source of intuition or spiritual reality, using the physical body as a vehicle. ***It is the right hemisphere that brings value into existence*** through its open attention to the natural world and the sharing of experience, meaning and practice with others. By contrast, left hemisphere cultures are focused more on deductive reasoning and material consciousness, which allow a human being to survive in a physical body through objectivity, factual representation and reproducible

experience. Using this rationality, ***the left hemisphere is utterly certain that it is the creator of value*** and that individuals control the flow of energy in societies through their personal intentions and incentives. ***The cerebral conflict over the actual source of value has created an enormous schism between whole and self, affecting virtually everything on the planet.*** It is the underlying cause of our many problems.

Phenomenology reintroduced civilization to the unity of coherence and individuation that is now recognized as the commons. The commons are a relational whole in which the parts take on a new significance through their interconnection. Co-governance (harmony, management, science) and co-production (freedom, creation, art) express our dispositions to one another and the world. Our mutual engagement with the commons brings about a shared understanding of *what already is or is now emerging*. This allows us to recover the ontological and epistemological meaning of common property in the practices that sustain these resources. Through the set of relationships we forge among ourselves and our commons, we come to realize that Earth has its own means of consciousness and that the collective practice and collaboration of living bodies, not their functional utility, is the source of meaning and value. The commons reveal the implicit nature of human knowledge which arises, not through the isolation, division and analysis of our perceptions, but in the oneness of perception experienced by the human body and its interaction with the bodies of others.

The interrelated cycles and functions of the human body are the key to understanding how the economic world may be reunited with the ordinary world from which it sprang. (This theme will be explored in Part Four.) Despite the constant reminders from our right hemispheres that our bodies are comprised of the energy and consciousness of Earth, the present economic system of C-M-C' (material subsistence) and M-C-M' (material acquisition) still treats the Earth and its bodies as dead matter without awareness. Through intersubjectivity and empathy, we are beginning to feel how reality is constituted, not with the willful, possessive mind, but in the vital, intelligent life of the human body in consonance with other bodies and their connectedness with Earth. From this deep listening, we experience division and unity as more than the sum of the parts. We realize how self and whole are reintegrating through the knowledge of our living bodies, spreading the consciousness of oneness among all citizens of the planet and calling us to replenish the world, renew these shared spaces and rebuild our commons.

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