

Deserving, Gifting, and Needs

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L'auteur s'interroge sur les « besoins » et les « mérites » dans le contexte du don. Son but est de poser toute la notion du mérite et de proposer un cadre basé sur le bon vouloir afin d'assurer le transit des ressources mondiales. Elle suggère des exemples ordinaires d'économie historique avant d'assurer que c'est le glissement vers l'agriculture qui a motivé l'accumulation et la possession des ressources plutôt que sur leur circulation. Ce geste vers une nouvelle structure économique a développé des récits à propos de qui méritait et qui ne méritait pas selon la loi divine ou la moralité pour justifier les inégalités inhérentes; une discussion autour du don comme économie alternative qui n'est pas attachée à la valeur mais plutôt aux besoins et aux soins. Elle termine sur une image d'un monde futur qui serait basé sur le soin et la collaboration plutôt que sur la raison.

I still remember hearing from my late sister, Inbal, about the moment her son learned that some of the people he only knew as his adult friends were receiving money as part of the relationship they had with him. Throughout his childhood, he never had anyone in his life whom anyone around referred to as a babysitter—only friends, both male and female, who populated his life in the absence of school. Upon discovering that money was part of the equation, he was distressed, struggling to integrate this knowledge that threatened to diminish the value of the relationship. At that early age, he had already recognized the implicit undermining of relationship that exists within the landscape of exchange. He only settled when Inbal reinterpreted the relationship and removed the exchange element from it. The dilemma, she explained to him, is that if his friends didn't receive money, they would not be

able to set aside the time to nurture their friendship with him, and they would need to see him less. The shift from exchange back to relationship, now expanded to include everyone's needs, allowed those friendships to continue uninterrupted, involving the entire family, some of them lasting through and beyond his childhood.

We all know what he knew then: there is nothing sweeter than giving and receiving within the context of human relationships based on a flow of generosity and care. We all were once babies, and almost all of us were given to simply because we had a need, as Genevieve Vaughan has been calling to our attention for so many years.

At the same time, even those of us who have not been mothers and caregivers for the young, have no doubt had the experience of giving, purely, without any expectation of receiving anything back. Time and time again I have seen how people light up when asked to describe a time they did that. Yet, as adults in the modern world, these experiences are uncommon for us.

Instead of giving and receiving based on needs and availability of resources, we have constructed mechanisms that hide each other's needs. We base our giving and our asking, if we even do the asking, on what we and others deserve rather than what we and others need. "Deserve" is a different basis for allocating resources than the simple mechanism of recognizing a need and responding to it, which operates in so many of our relationships, outside the market. "Deserve" leads to competition, fighting, and coercion, because someone has to decide who deserves, and that person is never the person in need. "Needs" lead to commonality, collaboration, and willingness. In this article I aim to call the entire notion of "deserve" into question,

and to propose a framework of needs and willingness on which to base the flow of resources in the world.

Needs and Money

More and more of our needs are attended to through the abstract market in the form of commodified goods and services instead of in direct relationship with nature and with each other. In the market, giving and receiving are coupled so tightly and monetarily that neither truly

on need, while in reality healthcare is rationed already based on money rather than need. There is an implicit moral dimension here, too: we have been socialized to believe that those without resources, even in dire poverty, deserve their condition, and those with more resources deserve to have them, and to have their needs prioritized as a result.

Needs, Collaboration, and the Commons

My vision is of a world in which we all belong to the

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happens. We have fewer and fewer opportunities to experience pure gifting and pure receiving, fully separated from each other.

In the process, we have moved from the realm of interconnection to the realm of separation. Once separation became the foundation of everything from our meaning-making frames to the institutions that govern our lives, the results have been profound. We have replaced human needs with notions of fairness and deserving; relationships based on care with exchange based on rules; and the flow of resources with the twin phenomena of unlimited accumulation and manufactured scarcity.¹

Today, our made-up world of markets and money masks the reality of our interdependence by making invisible the relationships that go into what we buy. That we have money to pay for bread makes us no less dependent on others for that bread to come into existence. It only gives us the illusion of self-sufficiency while in reality the involuntary gifts of other people feed us, clothe us, and support our many other needs. With this illusion, we can easily lose awareness of our relationship with them, and, by extension, of their human life, their needs, and, all too often, their suffering.

Money masks the reality of choice by creating the appearance of a law of nature to explain why things are the way they are instead of recognizing that everything social is the way it is because of prior human choice. In particular, the presence and extent of extreme inequality in access to resources is normalized through money. Thus, for example, attempts to pass legislation that would establish socialized healthcare in the State of Oregon were criticized for rationing healthcare when it would be based

earth, in which we value people and life, in which a flow of generosity allows everything that needs doing to be done with true willingness, and in which we all share our gifts and receive what we need.

This vision flies in the face of what we have been trained to believe is our human nature. Modern economics—the study of the allocation of scarce resources—posits the existence of homo economicus: the creature who aims to maximize its own self-interest at all costs, where the only block to infinite consumption is the availability of goods and services at a cost it can afford.² In *Sacred Economics*, Charles Eisenstein challenges both aspects of this picture. First, he calls our attention to the uncomfortable insight that the more we collectively grow the economy, the more scarcity we will collectively manufacture. He also reminds us that human needs have natural limits and are not insatiable. When we are hungry and need food, we will eat until we are satisfied. Money, on the other hand, which is not a human need, we can never have enough of.

This insight about human needs is consistent with what I have managed to learn about the way the commons work. The work of Nobel prizewinner, Elinor Ostrom, especially in, *Governing the Commons*, exposes a major flaw in Hardin's "tragedy of the commons." Contrary to his abstract model of open-ended commons, actual commons tend to be managed by a specific group of people who are connected to each other by bonds of purpose, vision, or sometimes their collective ability to survive. As a result, they create agreements and follow them for everyone's benefit. This is what humans have been doing since time immemorial. It's only our current focus on individual benefit through consumption without limits that is the

tragedy, rather than the previous forms of social organizing we have known for so long.

One striking example is the acequias, a system of irrigation that's been in operation in parts of Spain and in areas of the U.S. previously colonized by Spain, especially the arid Southwest. This is an elaborate system of ditches and canals that spreads over hundreds of miles and is governed by a collaborative and complex arrangement explicitly at odds with norms of private property. For example, private property approaches to water management rest on the doctrine of "prior appropriation," which, "considers water to be a commodity owned by private individuals while acequia systems treat water as a community resource that irrigators have a shared right to use, manage, and protect."³ The system includes methods for dispute resolution for those rare occasions when the collaboratively maintained agreements are not sufficient. In addition, this system has been an improvement to the natural terrain and has been preventing erosion and depletion of resources. Considering the fact that disputes over water have often been causes for war, the fact that a collaborative, environmentally-friendly, and sustainable system for managing water in an area that is nearly a desert has been in continuous operation for hundreds of years challenges many of our assumptions about optimal resource management (Amster). To belabor the point: there is no scarcity manufactured in this commons; rather, an ongoing consequence of resources held in common by a community is to have more abundance (Bollier).

The continued existence of the commons—and certainly the emerging movement to reclaim it⁴—by virtue of its fundamentally collaborative and needs-based principles, is an ongoing threat to the taken-for-granted framework of private property and the systemic favoring of unlimited wealth accumulation. In addition to the theoretical challenge, the commons constitutes a practical threat to existing systems, because it functions in stewardship rather than ownership, and because sharing of resources means that people are less likely to turn to markets for their needs. Ultimately, the existence of the commons challenges the most sacrosanct institution of the market: private property. This is partly why those who had accumulated resources—feudal lords and capitalists—have so often and repeatedly attempted to sever the relationship between communities and the resources they hold in common.

Indeed, as Genevieve Vaughan notes, "Laws are necessary to keep the world safe for commerce—for the exchange economy. They protect the market from those with unsatisfied needs" ("Jacob Wrestles with the Angel" 8). What this means, in the end, is that all of us accept unsatisfied needs as an unfortunate feature of life instead of something that has been collectively created by the

shift to market and exchange. Conversely, when people manage their own resources together, they tend to allocate them based on needs and gifting. "If gift giving were the norm," continues Vaughan, "the normal way of behaving, everyone's needs would be filled" (ibid 8).

In *Soil and Soul*, Alastair McIntosh provides a very vivid way of seeing what this means. For one example, even into the 1960s, in the semi-pre-modern milieu that was McIntosh's upbringing on an island fifty miles off Scotland's coast, island inhabitants didn't have refrigerators. This meant they couldn't hoard fish even if they had been tempted to. Instead, any abundance of fish, regardless of who had it, resulted in the bounty being shared. Webs of mutual support sustained these fragile communities until modernity finally hit in the 1970s and brought an abrupt ending to the old ways with the disappearance of the fisheries almost overnight due to so-called efficient methods of fishing. Between David Bollier's *Think Like a Commoner* and these vivid descriptions, the reality that collaboration, sharing of resources, and the intention to care for everyone's needs in the community are our ancestral past and our evolutionary expectation gathers momentum against the official stories of modern economics. As David Graeber notes in *Debt: The First 5,000 Years*, even "markets, when allowed to drift entirely free from their violent origins, invariably begin to grow into something different, into networks of honor, trust, and mutual connectedness" (387). They do this, as he notes elsewhere, because in any transaction, even commerce, "[i]f one is on sociable terms with someone, it's hard to ignore their situation" ("On the Moral Grounds" 70). Rather than what "rational" self-interest would posit, namely that we are attuned to our own needs in opposition to others', it appears that we are designed to respond empathically to others' needs.

If that is the case, then once needs lost their "bargaining power" when accumulation and exchange began, some powerful story had to have been created about why some people receive so much more than they need while others go hungry. This is apparently what has happened. In *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humanity*, Yuval Harari describes how the shift to agriculture, which in a very limited sense was a positive move for the species (increasing numbers), was disastrous for most individuals. There are a number of reasons for this reduction of well-being to individuals in which most people were worse fed, toiled longer hours, had smaller stature, more disease, and shorter lives than their hunter-gatherer forebears. Agriculture itself was responsible for some of this, but a great deal of it happened because grains needed to be stored. In the process, humans lost their capacity to move freely in search of food. As Harari so dramatically suggests, the door from hunting and gathering to agriculture was slammed shut behind humans

once the shift happened. Being in one place, in larger numbers, and dependent on stored food made humans more vulnerable to disease, to raids, and also to control and taxation. Their production flowed upwards towards those few individuals who managed to command power and amass resources way beyond their needs while also creating scarcity of resources for the majority of humans. Throughout our history, we have collectively created more and more resources, and we have collectively continued to funnel most of them to only a few individuals.⁵ This

than the former.⁹ I still believe that the difference between these two flavours is far smaller than the difference between collaborative, needs-based allocation and our historical and current systems that blend structural power and market logic in allocating resources.

As I see it, our ancestors accepted the story that explains vast resource disparities by coming up with a justification for why some get so much more because it helped make sense of the world, and because the alternative was just too painful: to continue to hold on to their needs and

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pattern only intensified with the industrial revolution and modern capitalism, creating ever more inequality even as technology and material possibilities expanded.⁶

Inequality and the Notion of Deserving

A host of previously unfamiliar relationships, rules, structures, and concepts could come into being with accumulation. Accumulation facilitates the ownership and protection of property that allows for continued accumulation. Accumulation removes resources from circulation, thereby making gifting that much harder to sustain as less is available to circulate back through other channels. Accumulation, first made possible on a significant scale by agriculture, can only sustain itself through coercion and violence. It's no wonder that the root for the word "bread" and the root for "war" are one and the same in Hebrew.

Most significantly for my current purposes, because accumulation is the source of persistent inequality, it gives rise to the notion of deserving⁷ to justify said inequality. This notion provides the powerful story I spoke about above that can help explain—both to the "haves" and the "have-nots"—why inequality exists.⁸ Simply put: inequality can be justified if everyone accepts the belief that some people receive way more than they need because they deserve it, and those who receive less than is enough for them receive so little because they don't deserve more. The specific flavour can vary: clearly the idea of being chosen by the gods is different from the idea of earning resources through hard labour and talent. Because we live in times when the notion of merit-based allocation of resources is prevalent, the latter version makes far more sense to us

their struggles in the face of massive and overpowering opposition by those in power.¹⁰

Deserving, Giving, and Receiving

My way of understanding a gift economy is that giving and receiving are uncoupled, with each being unconditional: the giver is not expecting to receive anything, and the receiver takes in the gift without any expectation of giving back. There is nothing remote or unusual about unconditional gifting despite how incredible, extraordinary, or utopian it may sound. In addition to being an inherent part of past systems such as the commons, it is the essential condition for the reproduction of our species. "We are born helpless infants, creatures of pure need with little resource to give, yet we are fed, we are protected, we are clothed and held and soothed, without having done anything to deserve it, without offering anything in exchange. This experience [is] common to everyone who has made it past childhood" (Eisenstein *Sacred Economics* 3).

Moreover, unlike what we have been taught, "although children are dependent, they are not passive and receiving itself is not passive. It is the creative complement of the gift, without which the gift or service does not really exist. The receiver must accept and use the gift or it is wasted and becomes negative" (Vaughan "Shifting the Paradigm" 3).

In other words, the giver and the receiver are united in their acceptance that resources flow, simply, from where they exist to where they are needed. The net result: an economy of needs and a morality of care. In Vaughan's words again: "The economic structure of gift giving would produce an ideological superstructure of the values of care

while the economic structure of market exchange would produce an ideological superstructure of competition and domination” (5).

If we were to restore or freshly create a gift economy world without money—the only truly sustainable future I can imagine—needs would once again become the organizing principle. Givers and receivers—all of us in different moments, that is—will be united in an endless choreography of generosity and care.

Such a world cannot come into existence as long as the notion of deserving is deeply rooted in our consciousness, because considerations of who deserves what stop the flow of resources that is part of the gifting paradigm and of life overall. As potential givers, both individually and societally, we calculate what people deserve—note the concept of the deserving poor, for example—and stop short of feeding and clothing those deemed unworthy of such gifts. As potential receivers, we lock ourselves in shame, deeming our own selves undeserving, and don't make our needs known sufficiently to those who may naturally want to give to us.

In my own experiments to move in the direction of a gift economy through my trainings and workshops, despite painting a wildly enticing picture of a gifting world, I have encountered immense obstacles to creating a flow of generosity of the kind I envision, even though the individuals involved have repeatedly shared how moved and inspired they've been by the experimentation and the vision. In my profound struggle to make sense of the very marginal success of these experiments (Kashtan “The Impossible will Take a Little While” parts 1 and 2), I have mostly looked at the immense difficulty of being an island of experimentation. Why? “More than anything external,” says Eisenstein in *The More Beautiful World*, “it is our own habits that draw us back into the old story after we have glimpsed a new one. These habits run so deep that we are rarely aware of them; when we are, we usually assume them to be human nature” (110). These habits may well be mine. In the course of writing this article, I learned of another experimenter, Mirror, who described her own experiments. Mirror's experiments have gone further than mine, and she plunged fully into the gift economy, leaving no part of her operation focused on exchange. Mirror has encountered shame, especially about her needs, and reveals a number of deep questions I want to continue to explore. To what extent have my own experiments taken off only partially because I still don't know how to ask in a way that truly shows both the spirit of giving and the willingness to receive? To what extent is what I am offering simply not wanted enough at these times? There is a mystery to it that I want to remain humble to.

And there are also the habits of those of whom I ask.

Sometimes people find themselves unable to tap into the fullness of their generosity, blocked by notions of “market value” which is one way that “deserve” shows up, and their giving is limited. Some others are unable to hold their own needs with sufficient care, slipping into guilt and shame that either prevents them from attending to their own needs or causes them to give more than is sustainable for them, or keeps them from being able to make a true choice.

Overall, in the absence of systemic shifts in our culture and economy, expecting individuals to break with the norm to such a degree is a tall order. An island of gifting must be large enough to create its own robust systems (think Wikipedia) to be able to generate or tap into sufficient generosity in enough people to keep it going. None of us can singlehandedly bring about an economic transformation, because it leaves us too rooted in “the general scarcity for the many that is artificially created by Capitalism that keeps most people stuck in the exchange paradigm” (Vaughan “The Gift Economy” 28). This situation turns unilateral gifting into a sacrifice. A larger cultural shift— nothing short of rethinking our theories of human nature—is necessary for unilateral gifting to be viable and sustainable on a large scale. Deep down, how many of us really trust that people who are free from obligations would access willingness to work, to give, to contribute, or to make an effort as much as, or even more than, when there are monetary rewards for hard work or and punishments for its absence?¹¹

From Rationality to Care

The change necessary to shift us to a gift economy parallels other necessary cultural shifts, most notably the shift from reason to care as the basis of making sociality possible. Kantian notions of morality, still prevalent today, posit reason as the only human faculty that can transcend the focus on “self,” arguing implicitly or explicitly that emotions and needs are either unreliable or outright self-centered.

A major paradox exists in the attempt to ground morality and self-transcendence in rationality; this is an incompatibility of sorts between moral theory and economic theory. In the former, rationality is seen as the pinnacle of being human, the quality that would allow us to transcend our passions and selfishness. In the latter, rationality, in the form of rational self-interest, is the very embodiment of that which morality seeks to transcend. In this way, rationality in the economic realm is about maximizing the very quality—selfish attention to our own needs above all else—that we are supposed to transcend by rationality in the moral realm.

An ethic of care provides an entirely different basis for grounding moral motivation and action: relationships,

emotions, and need satisfaction. Caring, by its very definition, “implies a reaching out to something other than the self” (Tronto 102). It also “implicitly suggests that it will lead to some kind of action” (ibid). This combination of an irreducible transcendence of self and the impulse to action makes caring a peculiar and unique human capacity, and an intriguing and deeply feminist foundation for alternative conceptions of morality that unite morality and economics in the very act of restoring our capacity for togetherness and generosity.

who breaks out of the focus on the pursuit of self-interest narrowly defined. “How selfish soever man may be supposed, there are evidently some principles in his nature, which interests him in the fortune of others” (Smith *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* 9). His practical advice? “If to be beloved by our brethren be the great object of our ambition, the surest way of obtaining it is, by our conduct to show that we really love them” (ibid 225).

Today, a new version of this frame comes from Eisenstein: “Gifts cement the mystical realization of participation in

Care is inextricably connected with empathy and with need satisfaction, thus intimately linked with the potential for restoring a gift economy. Care consists of recognizing that a need exists, deciding to meet it, translating that decision into action, and ensuring that the action indeed meets the need.

It is no surprise that an early critique of Lawrence Kohlberg’s theory of moral development came from a feminist, Carol Gilligan. Kohlberg situated his work squarely within a rule-based morality, enshrining the capacity to make moral decisions on the basis of abstract rules that apply to all—the very essence of rationality within moral theory—as the highest accomplishment. Kohlberg used only men in his study. Gilligan reproduced his study with women, who all scored two or three on a six-point scale of moral development. In her book *In A Different Voice*, Gilligan critiques a system that prioritizes and makes normative a way of thinking that is habitual mostly for certain men, precisely the white, college-educated men living in industrialized U.S.; the very group that often determines who is deserving overall. Gilligan developed an alternative sketch of a potential theory of moral development along the lines of responsibility, relationships, and care.¹²

A systematic analysis of an ethic of care such as that delineated by Gilligan takes us beyond intuitive notions of care. Rather, what care is must be made specific and concrete. In *Moral Boundaries*, Joan Tronto views care as “both a practice and a disposition”; both thought and action. Care is inextricably connected with empathy and with need satisfaction, thus intimately linked with the potential for restoring a gift economy. Care consists of recognizing that a need exists, deciding to meet it, translating that decision into action, and ensuring that the action indeed meets the need. Each of these steps raises specific moral considerations and conflicts, which cannot be addressed easily within traditional cognitivist moral theories.

Much to many people’s potential surprise, it is one of the most revered fathers of modern economics, Adam Smith,

something greater than oneself which, yet, is not separate from oneself. The axioms of rational self-interest change because the self has expanded to include something of the other” (*Sacred Economics* 10).

When care, for both our own and others’ needs, takes center stage, we create or restore a full gift economy. In such an economy, the motivation for work is dramatically different. Instead of an extrinsic motivation relying on money, the gift economy gives rise to an intrinsic motivation in which rewards emerge directly through the act of satisfying needs (Vaughan “The Maternal Gift Paradigm”). When our needs are nakedly visible, without the abstraction of markets, without the separation created by exchange, and without the negation of gifts by money in particular, our relationships are also restored.

Given how far we are from the primacy of care, steeped in competition and individualism, our collaboration muscles have atrophied so dramatically that many of us are reluctant to engage with others in sharing, in collaborating on projects, and in co-creating our future. Two study-circle communities I was part of disintegrated within weeks of someone bringing up the topic of sharing resources within the community. It was evident to me that everyone saw sharing as loss, both of autonomy and of their own resources. Rarely did they see or believe that in the proto-commons that we would have created, there would be a meaningful gain to them from access to more resources than they could ever possibly have on their own.

Putting care and human needs in the center and shifting to gift economies and the commons would require us to relearn how to collaborate. The skills of collaboration are not as obvious as they appear. Acquiring them is

not simple when the legacy of separation is so deeply ingrained in us after centuries of exchange, coercion, and competition. Learning to collaborate entails deeply integrating our conceptual and spiritual understanding that we are interdependent by developing practices and tools that support us in continuing to prioritize care for all needs when we reach the inevitable and necessary conflicts. It entails healing from the trauma of separation and (engineered) scarcity that lead us to look for consumer solutions rather than collective ones. It will take learning again to experience ourselves as part of a larger whole, so we know that our needs matter and are important, as well as actively learning about the impacts of our choices on other people's ability to attend to their needs. It will take the courage to step away from control and into the unknown of caring for the whole.

Collaboration, especially around the management of finite resources on which our entire species depends, is about always looking for a solution that works to include as many needs as possible in any given dilemma. We are not used to using everyone's needs as a lens through which we approach decision-making. Could we find our way to transcend coercion, incentives, and sacrifice to move to a world where true willingness in service of the whole is the primary motivation for gifting each other and attending to all that needs doing? Given the accelerated rate at which we are depleting the world's resources, this is not simply a nice utopian ideal; our very survival as a species may depend on solving this puzzle.

As we learn to speak of needs, our own and others', we create the possibility of a world in which we provide for everyone's needs not because they deserve it, not because they have done something to earn it, or possess the resources to ensure that others will provide for them. Rather, in that world we provide for everyone's needs because those needs exist, never fully separate from our own.

Wisdom Tales from the Future

Since I was five years old, I have lived with a dim yet uninterrupted vision of a full gift economy. I have had a template in my mind of how such a world could operate, in practical reality, for at least twenty years, ever since the day when I understood, in a flash, that the reason economics never made sense to me was that it was based on the assumption of scarcity.¹³ A few years ago, I took the plunge and fleshed out the structural and systemic details of a world based on full gifting, wholehearted willingness, and collaborative decision-making and governance. Because models for this way of operating, on any large scale, are lacking, I have utilized fiction to describe such a world in the last section of my book *Reweaving Our Human Fabric*:

Working Together to Create a Nonviolent Future. I created a collection of twelve stories, each describing a day in the life of a character placed somewhere in that world to illustrate what human life and social systems could look like when these principles are fully operationalized:¹⁴

- There is no money and no exchange in this future world.
- Everything that needs doing is done voluntarily and coordinated with everyone else's actions.
- The resource allocation system is globally coordinated and locally managed.
- There is no government as we know it, and no coercion except under conditions of imminent threat to life.¹⁵
- Conflict exists and is an ongoing feature of life, and mechanisms for addressing it are abundant and robust.

I want to conclude this article with a quote from one of those stories that best describes the reality that the inhabitants of that world experience, so different from our fundamental separateness and existential anxiety. This quote is from the story called, "Water," and the character is just about to embark on an imaginary future chapter of a long-standing conflict surrounding the extraction of water from Owens Valley for use by the city of Los Angeles:

What would she do if she let go of doing high-stakes global mediations? She was suddenly awash in gratitude. Despite her rough start, she was, now, living in the post-coercion world. She didn't have to work. She could take time off. She could just focus on nurturing herself after several decades of intensive work. There was so much she wanted to learn and experience. She could decide not to work forever, and she would still get food and shelter. One of her closest friends back home had not worked in any capacity for over two years, and the people at the food distribution center didn't even blink. Of course they didn't know. Why would they know, or care, anyway? They, too, could choose not to be where they were. Forty years after the transition it was still hard to grasp that the old days were really over. (298)

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Endnotes

¹Later, I return briefly to the question of where the proclivity for accumulation comes from.

²The original description of this “creature” is given in a famous passage by Adam Smith: “It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest” (*The Wealth of Nations* 119). The term itself was not utilized until the late nineteenth century. Modern economics is not the only source of that image. For example, Freud’s model of human nature includes within it two insatiable drives, such that even preservation is not of significance to the id and something external to it must enter the picture to ensure continued survival.

³See en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Acequia for more details about the ways the acequia norms stand at variance with more modern notions of governance and private property.

⁴This movement is supported and documented by the Commons Strategies Group. Their first volume documents many cases of commons and the tense relationship between the commons and markets. See *The Wealth of the Commons: A World Beyond Market and State*.

⁵Just as much as those who believe in Homo Economicus have the task of explaining altruism, those of us with a different picture of human nature have the task of explaining accumulation, violence, and greed. This clearly goes beyond the scope of a short article. Several of Alfie Kohn’s books—especially *No Contest: The Case Against Competition* and *The Brighter Side Of Human Nature: Altruism And Empathy In Everyday Life*—shed light on some of the relevant questions. My own most comprehensive attempt to address this question is in *Beyond Reason: Reconciling Emotion with Social Theory*, my unpublished Ph.D. dissertation. A shorter version appears in my *Spinning Threads of Radical Aliveness: Transcending the Legacy of Separation in Our Individual Lives*, especially the chapter “Whence Violence.”

⁶For an economic analysis of how capitalism contributes to growing inequality, see Thomas Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*.

⁷Here I focus only on the concept or notion of the verb “to deserve,” as the verb itself (at least in English) only came to be used in the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries for the purpose of “having earned a claim or entitlement.”

⁸In my writing here, I am differentiating the framework of human needs from that of fairness and deserving. A slightly more nuanced version might be that some understanding of fairness is always present, and, with

our growing separation, becomes less and less connected with the concreteness of needs as its measure and more and more associated with abstract rules and justifications. ⁹As an example of a merit-based deserving framework, Chris Jencks, in “What Is the Underclass—and Is It Growing?” describes the New Right’s way of thinking and moralizing about poverty, which frames the underclass as deserving its social exclusion based on their own choices. They are assumed to reject the values and norms of other classes and to engage in behaviors that challenge those norms, including the very dependence on society for support instead of pursuing educational opportunities, norms, and behaviors that would allow them to climb out of their current conditions. That there is a structural dimension to their exclusion, and that only individuals, and few of them, could ever climb out of a class whose existence is essential for continued capitalist production, is a glaring absence in the kinds of thinking that Jencks discusses.

¹⁰As Silvia Federici documents in *Caliban and the Witch*, the establishment of the capitalist order after the feudal order effectively disintegrated required massive forces to subdue ongoing popular revolts all over Europe over the course of about two hundred years, roughly from 1450-1650. Could it be the case that part of what happened during that transition is that the old justification story was no longer believable, while a new one wasn’t yet established sufficiently?

¹¹In *The More Beautiful World*, Charles Eisenstein repeatedly speaks about the necessity and power of disrupting the old story and inhabiting the new one as part of the process of transitioning into a livable future.

¹²Gilligan’s critique and findings were later replicated outside the U.S. within formerly colonized communities and countries.

¹³This is, in fact, how economics is classically defined: the study of the allocation of scarce resources.

¹⁴Three of the stories are available online at *The Fearless Heart*.

¹⁵Two of the stories address this particular challenge, “No Easy Choices” and “So Much Love.”

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W. M. HERRING

Corn in Egypt

She stands in line at the Liverpool pier
one child, one bag, one ear of bearded wheat
wrapped in tissue, nestled deep,
two tickets for the Empress.

Ahead—
a husband on the CPR, a small flat,
a strange city in a harsh climate.
Behind—
sisters, servitude, poverty,
the weight of old ways.

A friend gave her the wheat
said there would be corn in Egypt.

Oh, Lord, let there be corn in Egypt.

W.M. Herring lives on rural property on Vancouver Island, in the traditional territory of the T'Sou-ke Nation. She shares this wonderful place with an abundance of wildlife, a few pets, and her husband. Her work has appeared in ARC Poetry, Freefall, Geez, Literary Review Canada (LRC), The Nashwaak Review, The Prairie Journal, and Queen's Quarterly, as well as other journals and anthologies.