

## Globalism: A Planet for Sale

Despite the short-term thinking notorious among corporate managers and the instant gratification promised to consumers, the market has a history. Though the first markets may have appeared in ancient Greek city states, today's *global* market originated in negotiations held between world powers after World War II.

In 1948, leading industrial nations founded the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) to foster economic integration and freer trade between states. As a result, tariff barriers dropped between capitalist powers even as the Berlin Wall went up. During the last thirty years, states have slowly stopped regulating their economies, and the global market has become a self-sustaining reality.

Dwarfed by multi-billion dollar capital flows and companies with assets greater than those of many countries, the individual becomes a passive consumer in a planetary supermarket, according to globalist theories. Citizenship is defined in terms of what one can or cannot buy. Though one citizen of a country theoretically has the same legal rights as another, consumers are only as equal as their incomes.

The less income we enjoy, the nearer we are to the demands of nature — like it or not. Nature makes itself known in market-oriented economic theories in the form of scarcity. Scarcity, we are told, is the reason why one good or service is more expensive than another.

In market-oriented economics, nature is no benevolent Gaia. Instead, "natural" scarcity makes people hungry enough that they will work, starves off those unable to compete, and rules that the victims of disease and poverty have simply lost their case in the court of natural law.

As Canadian economic writers Eric Kierans and Walter Stewart warn, to abdicate responsibility to the market is to make for a future where only money is green and only markets free.

"A world market," they write, "would provide the opportunities for ever larger accumulations, since only the large corporations could operate efficiently therein and competition would be limited and defined by them. What it would not provide is any ethical, moral, political or national basis on which to make the agonizing decisions that govern us."

## The Gaia Hypothesis: A Planet of System and Spirit

With the benefit of scientific hindsight, Gaian theorists have confirmed experimentally what first peoples knew long ago — the systemic integrity of nature. Global temperature, the rate at which oxygen is absorbed by plants and animals, the balance of alkalines and acids, and other life-essential processes are all held to depend on a world-wide co-ordination of almost supernatural sophistication.



Though the pages of the Gaian literature celebrate the authors' favourite green spaces, a subtle anti-humanism enters their arguments as a byproduct. Little room is made in their universe for the special responsibility human beings have to solve the problems they have created. The prescription is that Gaia will outlast *homo sapiens*, and heal itself. In Gaian theories, nature assumes a consciousness denied to human beings.

Because the Gaian hypothesis is not first an economic theory, it is concerned less with cultural decisions about "value" and more with what is valuable. Economic development doesn't merit mention in the Gaian literature. Instead, the "valuable" includes all species and non-species elements of world ecology.

Gaian theorists are more aloof when they write about how we can work towards a more organic planet. Joseph Lawrence, author of *Gaia: The Growth of an Idea*, cites the Green Party movement as an example of how Gaia might be taken to the streets. James Lovelock, whose *The Ages of Gaia: A Biography of a Living Earth* is perhaps the most popular of the Gaia books, denounces what he terms the "three C's" of environmental destruction — cars, cattle and chainsaws. But both offer only the most tentative and, occasionally, controversial solutions.

For example, Lovelock believes agriculture a greater enemy than industry due to chemical run-off and soil degradation; he favours nuclear power over fossil fuel and hydroelectric generation because the latter's polluting potency is, for him, greater; and he worries over the effects of global ecology — particularly the moisture and oxygen-producing Amazon forests — more than acid rain or ozone depletion.

The Gaians prefer ethical explanations over arguments critical of how social and economic injustice harms the planet, and this qualifies their argument's quality. Gaian notions depend greatly on deep ecology — an environmental philosophy which, in placing the ecosystem at the centre, sometimes dismisses human solutions. Social ecology — which relates environmental problems to things like income equality, Third World debt, and class — is sidestepped in the process.

## A planet for the saving

Gaia's long-term is a human eternity, and even her short-term — a geologic phase, for example, like our

present Phanerozoic period — is 600 million-odd years longer than the average mortal lifespan. Gaian solutions depend on the Earth's long-term regenerative powers, and operate independently — or even thrive on the extinction — of the time-bound human species.

Where the Gaia hypothesis fails to satisfy immediate needs, however, the globalist view is too ready with a smile and a promise of short-term gain without regard for the long-term pain of corporate control and reckless consumerism.

Markets are not "level playing fields" or neutral trading areas, but a cultural ordering of nature that if left unchecked will turn air and water — termed "free goods" by economists — into mere products for sale.

Nor are trade and investment merely neutral phenomena. They shape our policy and personal decisions directly. Moreover, the international division of labour (the pattern of distributing different kinds of work around the world) is pressing the underdeveloped world into a wage slavery most of us would not accept in our own communities.

All of this suggests that we might look through the eyes of Nanabush as we get busy recycling, bicycling to work, or attending environmental action meetings in our communities. Unafraid of opinion and convention, the Ojibway culture hero dared to look afresh at the world, tempting people to be creative within their traditions and connect the smallest acts with their larger destiny.

Our cultures, indeed, would be well-served by the addition of startling and ecologically sensitive alternatives to those metaphors and methods that dominate us. For conceding production and distribution to spiralling economies of scale means more than giving up control over how business operates, labour is organized and products enter our lives. It means surrendering our collective imagination at a time when global crises make reconciling culture and nature a trick worthy of Nanabush.

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