



THE  
RECOVERY  
OF *love*

PART THREE: PATHWAYS

PAPER TEN

*The Economy  
of Love*

A Series of Discussion Papers by

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In The Preface to *Love and the Divine Feminine*,<sup>1</sup> Love says:

“Great Love is an old and lost language. And in your time, being little understood, it is difficult to speak of. Yet without Great Love nothing can be truly understood or said.

“In your disconnected world, you need to know this. Separated and apart, you find no place for me. Seeking only to have and then to have more, you find no place for me. In your greed and your violence, you find no place for me. But without me, everything disintegrates and cannot be reunited with the One.”

Suppose then for a moment that this urging of Love is true. Suppose for a moment, at this particular time and in every place, that we are being asked to become more truly ourselves, to shun fear and to love one another. Suppose that from some deep place within and beyond, and in response to our evident degradation of Nature, and the damaging rise of our greed and violence, we are being asked to turn and take another path – the path that returns us to our true Being, being within Nature, following the path of Love. To what extent would this challenge our present ways of being? Could we ask this question: if Love is to arise within us, how shall we be?



Those who have loved deeply, who have been deeply in love, will have some sense of what Love feels like. If they have loved completely, without condition – if they have dwelt in Love’s realm – they will know the utter surrender it requires. When this happens, we become part of that Divine Love which is in all that is; for such Love is both within us and beyond us; and it is both universal and eternal. Whether or not we see it and feel it, it is ever-present, ever moving and waiting to be manifest in all being, in all Nature.

Yes, you might say, we know that, but what about ‘the real

world'? To which I say, wait a moment: suppose that instead of taking it to be a platitude, we were to recognise it as the most vital and in-forming principle of Being. Suppose we understood it to shape all that truly is. How then would we proceed? How then would we be and what would we do in all the heavenly and mundane aspects of our lives? If Love is present in all that is, it must be present in our everyday experience. It must be more than an idea. It must work.

Suppose we take our present 'reality' head on. Suppose we take Love to be the essential underlying principle shaping that most dominant phenomenon of our time – our economy. Now that would, 'put a cat amongst the pigeons' but just for the moment let's see where this would take us.



It is easy to assume that when there is talk of 'the economy' it must be about something absolute, something like gravity, something with seemingly unquestionable laws that have to be obeyed. This is an illusion. There is no absolute form of economy, only differing economies that arise from the different principles and values that underpin them. And if a particular economy – like ours – is in disarray, then it is likely that there is something wrong, not simply with its technical operation but with its root principles and values.

The economy that has shaped our lives for the last fifty (and certainly the last twenty) or so years is one that has, of course, delivered much for many if not enough for all. But it is flawed – for it is an economy that is based upon some very strange and, as it happens, false principles. Founded upon Adam Smith's notion of 'enlightened self-interest', it assumes that if each one of us acts entirely selfishly then the wellbeing of all will be delivered. Oddly, you might think, personal selfishness is supposed to deliver communal wellbeing. This is an economy of separation.

This economy, this 'old economy', as we should now think of it, also assumes that 'growth' is always good; and that whatever the limits and whatever the costs, growth will always deliver wellbeing.

Indeed, it assumes that it is only growth that can do this – albeit that this growth is dependent upon high levels of what we now know to be unsustainable borrowing, and, more importantly, of an unsustainable and highly damaging exploitation of Nature. It is an economy of dogma in which growth has become not a means but a necessary end. This is an economy that insists upon having and then having more, without end, without limit.

Those who defend this old economy as the only one that is possible, may sound confident and persuasive but, in truth, they must surely now explain how it is that it has gone so badly wrong – not just a little wrong but spectacularly wrong; and we must be prepared to challenge their convention – to ask if the emperor really has any clothes on.

For example, how is it that above a certain level of need the evidence seems to suggest there is no positive correlation between increasing economic growth and increasing wellbeing? How is it that the gap between those who have more than enough and those who have too little has not diminished, but has increased – ever wider? How is it that this old economy, with its addiction to debt, in 2008/2009 all but destroyed Western society and brought great enterprises and even nations to their knees? And if it is so robust, why, in the UK, did it need to be supported with a subsidy of £375 billion – over £14,000 for each family in the UK, given to the very banks that brought about the collapse? What kind of ‘reality’ is this?



In truth, an economy is an organism; it is something that is alive and never quite still, always moving, rising and falling towards and away from an equilibrium upon which it never rests. Like the coming and going of the seasons or the rise and fall of the tide, this constant undulation is natural, endemic and not to be feared. From time to time, however, a distorted economy can become so strained and troubled, so overblown, that it crashes and breaks or it can be disturbed by events beyond its control, such as COVID19 –

for it is always more vulnerable than it cares to admit. And, when this happens, the damage may take a long time to mend. This is where we are now. BUT although business and political leaders may try to drag the economy back to where it was, the point we have to note is this: in its distress and disruption the economy is not striving to regain its old form. It seeks not 'a return to normal' but a transformation. Those who choose only to live in the old economy will deny this and will not be able to find the words to describe its reformation. They will, for example, quiver at the threat of what they will call a 'recession', when this may well be an economy naturally reforming – or rather transforming – to levels of consumption and activity that are more bearable, more sustainable.

At such a time, stillness and listening can be very helpful, for instead of the general wailing and gnashing of teeth, we can engage in quiet reflection, seeking to understand the new economy, aligning ourselves to its emerging form and enabling its coming – seeking to find our way through Love, since Love is the root of all that is. Love is the foundation of the True and the Good, the essence of True Being. Love is the wind within the wind, the breath within the breath, the economy within the economy. And we only see things as separate and apart because that is how we have learnt to see them. Almost without knowing we have come to suppose that we observe the world as 'outside' rather than experience it within.

And so the questions we might ask are these: What form will the new economy take, and can we help to shape it? And in this, what has Love to say? What might we do to bring about an Economy of Love?



At present, of course, whilst we cannot tell for certain what the new economy will be like, we can be sure it will, in time, be different from the old economy. Given the catastrophic financial and economic collapse that followed on from the banking crisis of 2007-2009, and now the global disruption of COVID 19 and

its many variants, it could be very different indeed; but to reach a better understanding, we will have to free ourselves from old prejudices and habits. We have to do this and we have to have the courage to believe in the possibility of something better, something, for example that reflects principles and values of simplicity, compassion and care for others. To do otherwise would be to surrender to a form of tyranny – a tyranny of ideas, a tyranny of perception that would close off all other possibilities and return us to the very imperfection, imbalance and injustice from which we seek to move.

And we have to do this despite seeing (or, perhaps, because of seeing) that the world of commerce and banking, and the politics of economy, seem to have changed so little since the crisis of 2008/2009. The realm in which bankers live seems to ordinary people like you and me to be a world of make-believe. Despite the fact that we saved them, they seem disinclined to say either ‘sorry’ or ‘thank you’. They seem to have no sense of how extraordinary their world is; they seem content with business as usual. Our sense of confusion may arise from our failure to understand fully the fetter and power of convention; to see how impregnable is the realm of convention; to understand that those who ‘own’ convention seldom find it necessary to justify what they think and do, because they assume it is taken as a given. We may also fail to understand the law of consequences – that particular thoughts give rise to particular outcomes; that without changing perceptions we will return inevitably to where we were. In government and most of commerce there is no change of perception, only a sense that to put things right we should continue as we were with some minor adjustments. We must always return to the dogma of growth, we must return to the dogma of debt, we must accept the dogma of ‘too big to fail’.



So, my dear readers, as one possible exercise, let us for a moment suppose that the new economy could be, must be, profoundly

different from the old one and that it could be, must be, informed by Love. If the old economy was shaped by selfishness and indebtedness, by addicted consumers with the need to have, and to have without limit, an Economy of Love will surely speak of something else. For, of their very nature, the principles, or rather, the qualities of Love arise from another realm: a place of integration, relationship and a caring for each other, for community and for Nature herself. The economy to which Love will give shape is therefore going to be markedly different: by the very nature of Love, it will be characterised by generous and caring relationships:

- If the old economy is about an addiction to growth, the economy of Love will be about steadiness and sufficiency – an economy of enough.
- If the old economy denies limits to growth, the economy of Love will accept working within them, seeking to integrate, sustain and enliven society, environment and economy together.
- If the old economy is about indebtedness, the economy of Love will be about thriftiness and keeping borrowing in check, wary of the bondage and burden of debt.
- If the old economy is about globalisation, the economy of Love, needing to work with relationships that are more personal and full of care, will be more about localism and regionalism.
- If the old economy is about selfishness and conflict, the economy of Love will be about compassion and co-operation.
- If the old economy is about grotesque inequalities of work and wealth, the economy of Love will be about much greater economic and social justice, an alignment of being and goodness.
- If the old economy reifies the individual, the economy of Love will nurture the individual-in-community.
- If the old economy sees Nature as a resource to be used without

regard, the economy of Love will work for the well-being of Nature as a whole.

And if we are told this is just wishful thinking, we should remember that whilst we may have a lot to learn, the guardians of the old economy – who will no doubt be our critics – are not in much of a position to tell us what to do, for their economy is broken. We must remember this and have the courage to keep telling ourselves that as all economies reflect particular principles and values, we can, if we wish, build an economy on good principles, on Love.

This new economy will, of course, have to take account of limits to growth. It will have to take account of climate breakdown and resource depletion – for, in truth, the economy dwells within the environment and is dependent upon it, and not the other way around. It will have to envisage a post-fossil-fuel society. It will have to face up to global and local shortages of food and water and the recurrent possibility of pandemics. And post COP26, it is clear that it will have to be an economy that can operate within the predicament of Plus 2°C. But most especially, all of this means it will be an economy that asks us to reconsider who is our neighbour. Faced with these challenges, how could a sustainable and loving economy be other than diametrically opposed to the old economy of selfishness, consumption, waste and injustice?

I would like to suggest that the Economy of Love will be good; and by this I mean that common goodness of which Thomas Aquinas spoke, a goodness that is as natural as it is all-pervading; a goodness that is within all that is; a goodness that will, if we but align ourselves to it, bring us to that Divine Goodness that some call God – and I call Love. And if the economy is to be good it can only be just. For, as we have found, an economy that is not just is not sustainable, since it is false. In truth, sustainability, goodness and justice are one. They dwell in the realm of Love, which is to say they dwell both within and beyond and are ever-present if we would but turn towards them.



It is at this point that many will ask: 'But what can we do?' Before I come to this, I need to say a bit more about the realm of Love.

The Economy of Love only makes sense if we take as a given that Love is; that Love is the essence of all that truly is; that Love is that which sustains the flux of all that is; moves us ever towards and within Divine Goodness; is all that is True; that we take Love seriously. I am asking you to accept not only that this is so, but also that if we proceed otherwise, we are bound to inhabit a realm of fantasy that cannot, in the end be sustained – because it is false. In this way, all thought of action, let alone any action itself, has to be preceded by a challenging clarification of perception, an insistence upon founding what is done in the Truth of Love and facing up to all that this implies.

Since transformation from one form of economy to another is somewhat uncertain, complex and probably messy, the first thing we must do is pause and reflect. Before we do anything else, we need to make an effort to try and discern what is happening in our economy now and what might happen to it the future; what are the strains and stresses seeking to pull it one way or another and can they, or should they, be resisted or nurtured; where might the emerging economy be seeking to go of itself, and what seems to be its natural inclination? We must listen. Then, and only then, will we have the understanding that will enable us, rightly, to do something else. Then, and only then, will we know what is being asked of us. I am suggesting, therefore, that for once we deliberately allow our waiting and listening to precede our doing, since nothing can arise before the possibility of its arising.

In any event, once we have better understanding, the answers to the question 'What can we do?' are likely to have many and diverse forms. For example: What can we do at home? What can we do at work? How shall we work? What can we do with our savings? What food shall we eat? How and where shall we live? Another, and more personal, way of expressing this will be to ask such questions as: What can I do as a mother, father, grandparent, teacher, carer, one who is cared for, lawyer, accountant, bus driver, shopkeeper, banker – and so on? There may be no immediate and detailed prescription, but there are questions to be asked, and, with Love, answers will be found.

There is a growing understanding that the rules of the old economy are no longer fit for purpose. For example, in America and then in the UK, post-2008/2009 some students began to protest against lectures in classical economics based upon supposed 'efficient markets' and 'perfect competition'. They saw that such propositions bore little or no relation to what they were experiencing in their own lives. There has also been a growing discussion about what is referred to as 'solidarity economics' (activities organised to address inequalities arising from capitalist economics); interesting work has been done by the New Economics Foundation in London to bring about new and dynamic forms of economics; and there is, of course, the more established discussion of Herman Daly's steady state economics and the propositions of 'limits to growth' as presented by Donella and Dennis Meadows and as now carried forward by CASSE (steadystate.org). Much of this is captured in a most accessible book, *Enough is Enough* by Rob Dietz and Dan O'Neill – to which I will refer again in a moment – and in an excellent paper by Andrea Weber on 'Enlivenment', which can be found on the [www.boell.de](http://www.boell.de) website.



One of the greatest obstacles to an Economy of Love is the belief that it cannot be done. Not only this, but that we should not even bother to try since we must unquestionably accept the economy we have. Many of us feel that there are people who are much more clever than we are, and who know why things are as they are. They have probably persuaded us that they live in 'the real world', and that all of our questioning and confusion is no more than private ignorance and fantasy. Indeed, this perception may be so deeply entrenched in us that even when we want to question the present economy, we remain caught in its grasp. We may feel that we are bound by its mantra of growth based upon debt, its reliance upon markets to sort out all our problems, perfectly and fairly. But there is another way. Instead of following the normal route of beginning

by critiquing the existing economy and then trying to propose something else, we can turn the matter on its head and proceed as follows:

- Start by stating clearly what it is that we hold dear in terms of our own personal and private values; that which governs our private life.
- With these values and principles in mind, describe the forms of public governance that must flow from them.
- Within this context, go on to propose an economy that is true to these values and these forms of governance.
- Then, and only then, look to see what it is that stands in our way.

The first advantage of this route is that it places economy within society. The second advantage is that, instead of allowing the present form of economy to shape all that can be said, it is put on the defensive – as it should be.

I once followed this process with a small weekend gathering at the Quaker conference centre at Charney Manor in Oxfordshire. The experience was telling. Firstly, it was clear that those gathered together found it easy to describe the values and principles that governed their lives personally and within their immediate community. Not surprisingly they emphasised the place of love, loving-kindness, honesty and simplicity in their lives, spoke of the need for a relationship of care with the Earth, and touched upon social values, such as equality and education. However, these values were seen to be contrary to the values and principles that were thought to govern society as a whole: the conventions of consumerism, materialism and a somewhat aggressive individuality.

We discovered that this gap between personal and public values had been reported in a UK Values Survey,<sup>2</sup> which had found that many people shared similar personal values: caring, family, honesty, humour/fun, friendship, fairness and compassion. The survey also had gone on to report on comparable values expressed in peoples' notions of 'community life' – quality of life, family, buy local,

helpfulness and friendship. But, when it came to perceived national values and forms of governance, there was a chasm. According to the survey, the perceived characteristics of national life were very different – bureaucracy, crime/violence, uncertainty about the future, corruption and blame, and concerns about drugs and alcohol abuse. Crossing this gap between the private and the public is difficult and we at Charney Manor found it difficult, too. This led us to search for more local forms of economy and governance where it would be easier to reflect personal and communal values. Indeed, it was suggested that we needed to take back to ourselves some of the responsibilities for governance that we had (knowingly or otherwise) given to others – either the state or markets. Importantly, here was the idea that markets sometimes work well, but may not always be suitable for all forms of activity, for example caring for the sick and elderly. Also important was the possibility of working outside the formal economy in neighbourhood schemes of one kind and another. And we talked about principles that would shape what we called The Good Economy – an economy that was local, just, simple, and sustainable. Standing in our way we saw not only the power of vested interests and the conventions of economic growth, indebtedness and consumerism, but also a deep sense of our own ignorance and powerlessness, feelings of isolation, fear of the unknown and not knowing who to trust; feelings of inadequacy when faced with something as apparently huge and powerful as ‘the economy’ and of the difficulties of becoming well-informed; the power of convention and its reluctance to change.

And here is the dilemma. As the economist Manfred Max Neef once said, the really strange thing is that in our thoughts about economy we should still be governed by ideas created in the late nineteenth century. If it was suggested that physics should still be based upon the astronomy, geology or biology of that time, it would be deemed absurd. But we seem content to take such an approach in economics.



I have already mentioned the book by Rob Dietz and Dan O’Neill,

*Enough is Enough.*<sup>3</sup> This is a book that provides a clear overview of a different kind of economy – a Steady State Economy (SSE) – one that is not dependent on growth, reduces levels of debt and points toward greater social and economic justice. In doing this, and in presenting a number of ‘strategies of enough’, it follows the advice famously given by Buckminster Fuller:

You never change things by fighting the existing reality. To change something, build a new model that makes the existing model obsolete.

Indeed, rather pleasingly, and thereby showing that these ideas of ‘enough’ are somewhat ancient, the authors quote Lao Tzu:

A person who knows enough is enough will always have enough.<sup>4</sup>

The authors tackle questions of consumption, population growth, indebtedness, employment and inequality and provide a ‘blueprint’ for SSE founded upon:

Sustainable scale, fair distribution, efficient allocation, high quality of life, improved investment, optimal labour productivity, innovative models of ownership, and environmental values.<sup>5</sup>

It is an economy supported by policies to:

Limit resource use, stabilise population, distribute income and wealth equitably, reform monetary and financial systems, change the way we measure progress, secure full employment, rethink commerce, change consumer behaviour, engage politicians and the media, and improve international cooperation.<sup>6</sup>

The aim is to work towards “sustainable and equitable human well-being.”<sup>7</sup>

All in all, SSE is presented as an economy that maximises its

end (sustainability and equitable well-being) while economising on the ultimate sources of that wellbeing (flows of materials and energy). It is a true economy of enough. It is an economy that is based upon people consuming enough to meet their needs and leading meaningful, joyful lives, without undermining the life-support systems of the planet. It seeks to stabilise population levels and encourage families and communities to become healthy, more connected, more resilient, more neighbourly. Entrepreneurial businesses would be encouraged to provide valuable services – not just to earn a profit but improve social and environmental conditions. Cities would be redesigned, with smaller populations working and living in more compact land areas; and new forms of farming would see the elimination of the need for constantly increasing food production, lightening the impacts people have on the landscape, with less land devoted to crop production. Our lands and waters would enter a new era of healing, with energy conservation becoming a high priority as people seek ways to accomplish their goals while minimising energy inputs. Expectations about money and investment would be adjusted to match reality.

It's not such a bad vision, and surely something worth considering and understanding better. And it is worth remembering that although an Economy of Love might at first appearance seem to be unconventional, that father, or perhaps great-grandfather of modern economics, Adam Smith thought otherwise. As my colleague Scherto Gill reports in her book, *Lest We Lose Love*,<sup>8</sup> Adam Smith was very interested in the matter of love. The core tenet, she says of Adam Smith's *The Theory of Moral Sentiment* is love.

To begin, Smith argues that love is an important moral sentiment in the dual dimensions in that “Man Naturally desires not only to be loved, but to be lovely.” In other words, on the one hand, humans need love, love of the self, from which arises our natural yearning to pursue [the] *proper object of love*; and on the other hand, humans also aspire to be such a proper object of love.<sup>9</sup>

So, before we cast Love aside, even in the very ‘real’ and practical realm of economics, we might just reflect on the extent to which it is not the founder of this realm but our own much more recent shift in values that holds this to be absurd.

Even in this brief introduction to the possibility of an Economy of Love it is not difficult to see how such an economy relates to principles of compassion and a care of others – the work of Love. It understands relationships, whether they are between the environment, society and the economy, or between individuals, families, communities, governments and commerce. It understands the need for care and reciprocity. Nevertheless, set against these new ways of understanding economy there are powerful forces of vested interest and inertia. And so, above all else, I am suggesting that the work of Love requires a firmness of resolve, a determination not to shrug our shoulders and just be led back to the old, false and damaging economy. If the old economy is to transform into the Economy of Love, it requires attentiveness, clear listening, thorough research, clarity of thought and a persistence grounded in the perception and practice by Love.

And in this we should be encouraged. For the darkness is most evident when the light begins to arise.

# Endnotes

1. Op cit, David Cadman, 2020, 8.
2. This was a survey undertaken by the Barratt Values Centre (valuescentre.com), but I no longer have the detailed reference.
3. Rob Dietz and Dan O'Neill, *Enough is Enough: Building a Sustainable Economy in a World of Finite Resources*, Routledge/Earthscan, 2013.
4. Ibid. 3.
5. Ibid. 74.
6. Ibid. 113.
7. Ibid.
8. Scherto Gill, *Lest We Lose Love: Re(dis)covering the Core of Western Culture*, Anthem Press, forthcoming 2022.
9. Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 1759.