

PART ONE: CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

Chapter 1

The Nature of This Work

This book offers a spiritually based sociology that goes beyond the parameters of a traditional treatise on economics. The term *spiritual* refers here to the eternal essence of the human being, of nature, and of the cosmos. It does not necessarily refer to any particular religious belief system. The soul element of the human being is the intermediary or bridge between spiritual essence and the body. This includes the soul functions of thinking, feeling, and willing.

The book is concerned with relationships and community building as much as with factors of production, consumption, labor, and finance. Relationships here include not only our relations to fellow human beings but also to nature and to the divine. Likewise, community building includes any individual or group effort intended to provide something indispensable—product or service—for the body, soul, or spirit of another person or group of people, in a way that expresses respect and gratitude. This characterization can also apply to the production side of an economic life that is imbued with social responsibility.

This book will consider certain hypotheses while appealing to the reader's own inner and outer experiences, common sense, and ideals. These hypotheses are supported by specific examples with enough references to current authors, researchers, and activists to enable readers to find additional information if so desired. From these hypotheses emerge suggestions of how to help implement

an associative economy as well as identify the requisite human capacities needed to work within it. One suggestion discussed is a relationship audit for businesses and farming enterprises. The audit helps managers and workers evaluate 13 types of relations within their organizations and between their organization and the surrounding community.

Considering Rudolf Steiner's Social Ideas

This exploration of modern economics, business, and money will draw primarily but not exclusively upon the social ideas of Rudolf Steiner (1861–1925), a European philosopher, social reformer, educator, and esotericist, mainly known today as the founder of Waldorf education, biodynamic agriculture, and anthroposophical medicine.

There are several reasons why Rudolf Steiner's social ideas should be considered when analyzing our current economic system and proposing systemic change. One is that his ideas already influence many leaders in alternative economic and social initiatives and movements. These include community supported agriculture, community land trusts, ethical banking, social finance, local or complementary currencies, sustainable agriculture, green politics, medical and educational freedom, and complementary medicine.² Also, his spiritual and social ideas have inspired unique community initiatives such as the worldwide Camphill movement for children and adults with special needs, with over a hundred communities on five continents; life-sharing communities for adults with special needs in Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and several other states; the Fellowship Community in Chestnut Ridge, New York, which offers elder care; and the multifaceted Sekem Community near Cairo, Egypt. In addition, many alternative economic endeavors that are not explicitly linked to Rudolf Steiner are guided by principles that coincide with his ideas, such as the decommodification of land, labor, and capital.

Steiner's social ideas, usually referred to as the threefold social organism or social threefolding (to be explained more fully in Chapter 4), provide a holistic conceptual framework that can be helpful in enabling people from various movements to work together practically. Collaboration of various alternative social movements is vitally important in order to build the force necessary to make fundamental changes in our current economic system and to combat the powerful, entrenched groups that are vested in maintaining the current economic arrangements.

Perhaps the most important reason to bring Steiner's ideas to bear on current social issues is that they take into account the spiritual dimension of the human being, social life, and the natural world. It is becoming apparent that nearly all leaders in the alternative social change movements have a spiritual worldview. Confirming this fact, Robert Karp, Executive Director of the Biodynamic and Farming Association, recently wrote, "Indeed, it is hard to think of a guiding light in the sustainable food and farming movement who [isn't] a profoundly spiritually-minded person." The economist and author David Korten has been expressing a similar thought for years: "I am struck by the fact that nearly every progressive leader of my acquaintance acts from a deep sense of spiritual connection. It is time to give voice to the spiritual foundations of our work through stories that celebrate the unifying spiritual intelligence that is the ground of all being."³ And Susan Witt, director of the newly formed New Economics Institute, expressed at its founding meeting the need to create a new economic system in terms of spiritual responsibility with the following words: "It is our responsibility—our spiritual task, if you will—to create an economic system that embodies our highest ideals as human beings, one that builds community, advances ecological health, creates beauty, provides sustainability, and encourages mutuality."⁴

Steiner's comprehensive spiritual view of economic and social problems and their solutions extends beyond free market capitalism and socialism, both of which posit economic life as the dominant and determinative social force.

Going Beyond Capitalism and Socialism

The threefold social organism is more than simply a mixture of the best features of capitalism and socialism. It is a new imagination of the nature of economic and social life that takes into consideration the whole human being—body, soul, and spirit.

This new imagination provides for:

- three equally important contrasting yet interweaving and interdependent spheres—culture, law, and the economy—rather than an economy superior to and dominating the others;
- self-administration for all three spheres instead of corporate-run states or state-run corporations;
- a fair distribution of wealth rather than an unjust distribution of wealth or reliance on a redistribution of wealth;
- means of production held in trust on behalf of a community and privately managed instead of private- or state-owned and managed;
- true democratic equality in the political realm instead of interest group pluralism;
- efficient, highly personal, non-competitive markets instead of impersonal competitive markets or impersonal state-controlled markets;
- a foundation for moral and social development that resides in individual human freedom rather than in the so-called morality of the market, moral imperatives of the state, or religious or scientific fundamentalism;
- workers as co-producers and partners with management rather than as competitors or as pawns of the state.

These principles will be explained and elaborated in the following chapters.