

**Creating Global Community
A Critique of
Economist Herman E. Daly**

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**World Constitution and Parliament Association
India Chapter**

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2019

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**World Constitution and Parliament Association
India Chapter
Global Communication Center
7, Jantar Mantar, New Delhi**

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There are many books, websites, and blogs today that talk about “global citizenship” or membership in our planetary global community. At the same time, there are thinkers who believe that such talk is substantially empty and superficial. Herman E. Daly, for example, argues that a community is necessarily local and that the best we can hope for is a “federation of national communities” (2014, 159-60). He fails to affirm that we must unite humanity within the holistic embrace of the Constitution for the Federation of Earth (Martin 2016) or some other sort of unifying plan for democratically governing our planet.

Daly is an important economist of sustainability who makes many excellent arguments concerning the need for our planet to move beyond the growth model to a model of development that focuses on qualitative improvement rather than quantitative growth. In this respect, his thinking is significant, which is all the more reason why we must address his misconceptions regarding the possibility of a “world community.” If the economic system is to really become a subset of the ecological system, Daly says is necessary, then our extraction,

production, consumption, and disposal must become a carefully monitored and modulated planetary project requiring a truly integrated human unity.

In the book that Daly co-authored with John Cobb, called *For the Common Good: Redirecting the Economy toward Community, the Environment, and a Sustainable Future*, they point out that human identity and many interactions are fundamentally characterized by “internal relations,” rather than merely “external relations.” To be characterized by internal relations means that the members so related are part of a larger whole in which each has a unique role that is significantly defined in terms of the others. Hence, a change in any one of the members of such a whole is simultaneously a change in other members as well. The relations are internal and hence constitutive of the whole and the parts. In their book, they apply this insight specifically to the fact that each human being exists as a “person-in-community” and hence, we are internally related to the others. This insight is excellent as far as it goes.

However, Daly apparently does not sufficiently realize the import of the universal cosmic and planetary holism that has emerged throughout the 20th century and continues to the present.

Scientists have realized that the universe is a single, integrated whole, the planetary biosphere is a single, integrated whole, and that human beings are a single species, each fundamentally related to all the others genetically, linguistically, and civilizationally. As Daly knows well, the logic of wholes was first effectively articulated by G.W.F. Hegel in terms of the dialectical relationship that obtains among the members within every whole. A correct logic, and correct articulation of the structure of every whole, specifies internal relations among the members. External relations may also be used for analysis to a certain reduced extent but are limited in a variety of ways and can never exhaust the description of the parts and their relationships.

The pervasive emergent holism discovered by the natural and human sciences directly implies the universality of internal relations throughout all dimensions of the universe. Daly correctly asserts that the one major area that has refused to incorporate internal relations into its dogmas is contemporary economics. Most economists today continue to work with the presupposition that human beings form a collection of atoms of “rational self-interest,” thereby giving us a dominant economic paradigm that is fragmented, atomistic, and intrinsically destructive of the internal

relationships that constitute the web of life and the biosphere of our planet (see also Kovel, 2007). Their “infinite growth” model is founded on the idea that economic growth is irrelevant to the limitations and interdependencies of our planetary biosphere.

Philosopher Errol E. Harris describes the logic of any holistic system with its internal relationships:

What is self-contradictory is what disrupts the system—what at one and the same time posits the system (implicitly affirming and exemplifying its principle of organization) and conflicts with that principle so that implicitly the structure is wrecked. A is what it is in virtue of its relationships with B, C, and D. It is not self-subsistent but depends for its being and character on its place in the prevailing order. Affirm A in isolation, as self-maintaining and independent, and, while implicitly invoking the structure that gives it meaning, you explicitly deny or suppress the principle of order giving the system structure. (2000b, 217)

Affirm endless economic growth in isolation and you “explicitly deny or suppress the principle of order” giving our planetary ecosystem structure. Similarly, at the moment, the United Nations

recognizes some 193 “sovereign nations,” all loosely related to one another through economic competition, external (“foreign”) relations, and unenforceable international laws. Daly argues that these nations can never become parts of a genuine human community but that we need to more loosely “federate” them in order to coordinate their attempts to deal with climate crises. They must primarily deal with the climate crises on the local level he claims. Here he seriously goes astray and presents us with recommendations that can only mean the failure to achieve a sustainable global economy and therefore a more or less rapid destruction of the planetary biosphere that supports human life.

Among these 193 entities, some are tiny island nations and others are gigantic economic and military powerhouses. Most of the larger ones are extremely diverse internally and could never qualify for the “national community” status that Daly recommends. In addition, Daly ignores the credible insights put forward in Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities*, which demonstrate that many of the historically arbitrary and contingent collection of “sovereign” nation-states now existing form simply “imaginary” communities and have no possibility of becoming something different.

We live in a globalized world in which we are economically interdependent, technologically, interdependent, culturally interrelated, and linguistically significantly globalized. We are rapidly moving toward civilizational unification yet Daly, like most of the economists that he criticizes, continues to cling to the atomistic fantasy of sovereign nation-states as if they were or could be genuine communities related to one another in a beneficent way. This system of sovereign states is an active impediment to integrating economics into our larger planetary ecosystem.

To apply the example above from Errol E. Harris: suppose nation A (the USA, with the verbal support of some lackey nations in Europe) attempts to overthrow the government of nation B (Venezuela, thereby dividing Latin American nations over this issue), and nation C (Russia) protests that attempt and establishes an air force base on one of Venezuela's islands, while nation D (China) increases trade with Venezuela to offset the US embargo. How are we ever going to convince these "sovereign" nations to give up this illusion of external relations and embrace the ecological paradigm of internal relations conforming to our planetary biosphere? How are we ever going to imagine that each of these

nations is a “community” that can activate sustainability internally and voluntarily federate with other nations who have similarly activated internal sustainability?

Will they not still be tempted to compete with one another economically? Will they not be tempted to compete with one another militarily? Will their “diplomacy” not continue to be based on the presumption of external relations rather than the authentic dialogue directed toward mutual understanding characteristic of internal relations? Who is going to ensure that they demilitarize, since militarism alone defeats sustainability? The Maha Upanishad of India’s sacred literature declares, Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, the world is one family. Both anthropology and biology confirm that the world is one family. Sovereign nation-states contradict this fact.

Another example is the tragedy of our planet’s oceans, which are now treated as an open-access resource for whomever wishes to fish or mine in international waters. The oceans are being overfished, and even the ecological environments that nourish new fish are being degraded. This resource that contributes to feeding one third of humanity is rapidly being destroyed. Environmental sustainability means

that these oceans need to belong to the people of Earth, ecologically managed by the united people of Earth, and their natural resources (including fish) equitably cultivated and distributed to the people of Earth. The same needs to be done for the air, forests, and other essential elements of our planet's ecosystem necessary for feeding and protecting the people of Earth and future generations. This can only be done through a democratically united world system.

This holism, pervasive throughout contemporary science and ignored by the pseudo-science of mainstream economics, leads us logically and morally to conclude that we must establish planetary economic, political, and cultural structures that mirror our unity in diversity. The illusion that nation-states are, or could be, genuine communities is just as dangerous as the economic illusion that individuals and businesses must compete in external relations with one another under a model of perpetual growth. Both illusory assumptions are disastrous for humanity. Both the nation-state system and global mainstream economics fragment humanity into external relationships. Both derive from an outdated paradigm centuries old when science knew nothing about holism.

It is true, of course, that we need local communities to deal with developing local sustainable economic systems that conform with the ability of the Earth to supply the input that feeds, clothes, and shelters us, and are capable of absorbing the wastes that this throughput inevitably generates. However, the uniting of humanity under the Constitution for the Federation of Earth does not inhibit or defeat these local initiatives: it can only empower them, coordinate them, and integrate them into the planetary holism necessary for a sustainable world. In doing so, the very act of ratifying the Earth Constitution and recognizing every human being as a world citizen with universal rights, including the rights to a sustainable planetary environment and the right to a demilitarized peaceful world, will help establish a planetary community consciousness.

Daly correctly claims that we need to focus on values: we need to pursue truly valuable ends to which we direct our economic and technical means. Without meaningful objective values, the result will be more of today's value nihilism in which no effective counter arguments can be mounted against a maelstrom of endless growth possibly leading to human extinction. Why not "eat, drink, and be merry for tomorrow we die"? Why not "après nous, le deluge"? Daly correctly

affirms the principle that ethics in the present is the lure of objective value from the future (2014, 128). However, he cannot bring himself to envision our true human destiny in a fulfilled human community. What calls to us from the future is a fulfilled human community of love, justice, truth, and ecological sustainability: *vasudhaiva kutumbakam*.

In the dialectic of wholes, the economic, political, and cultural structures that human beings create for themselves simultaneously foster or impede their intrinsic holism. The Earth Constitution fosters our planetary community in a huge way, bringing economics, politics, and culture more in line with what we truly are, in line with the holism that characterizes everything in the universe, including human beings. Herman E. Daly and others, who do such a great job of articulating sustainable economics, need to more consistently and honestly draw on the new holistic paradigm that is absolutely necessary across the board if human beings are going to have a future on this planet. The Constitution for the Federation of Earth is necessary condition for establishing human beings as a true global planetary community. Only a truly global community can give us a sustainable world system.

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