
Dr. Timothy Barker
www.diyngo.org

Where lies the ‘soul’ of our current dominant model of economic interaction at the start of this Twenty First Century? What does it mean to espouse financial mechanisms as the panacea to the many problems we are now facing? How can we turn around what many see as the cause of our current dilemmas into something of more general utility? Why should we even care that at least one billion people on our planet are living at the bottom of the economic pile? When should we start to act to help alleviate the disparity inherent in our current economic systems?

These are all extremely difficult questions to answer but let us try. Firstly, when we look at the news, it seems that the capitalist system has let us common citizens down. Those at the uppermost reaches of the financial echelons seem to display a wanton disregard for the welfare of the ‘average’ citizen (if there is such a thing). They have blatantly disregarded any sense of moral fortitude en masse to further their own personal goals and aims in the race to gather as much wealth as possible. This all at the cost of those of us who do not aspire to such material well-being or, perhaps more pointedly, do not have access to the mechanisms to achieve such preposterously selfish behaviour through nothing but accidents of birth. Or, moreover, realise that at this juncture in our development as a species there are more pressing concerns for us to be considering such as the state of the planet or the amassing of stockpiles of weapons of mass destruction. Those at the heart of the financial systems that now effectively ‘run’ the planet did not seem to display any moral codes during the recent collapses of their own systems.

So, secondly, given that there seems to have been an absence of moralistic behaviour in the global capitalist system of late can we really expect those who retain that modus operandi to display a sudden change of heart and begin to embrace more socially responsible behaviors? Can a leopard really change its spots or is it still the same beast beneath a veil of cleverly orchestrated camouflage? Numerous nation states around the world are now speaking of introducing various nouvelle capitalistic mechanisms in order to reign in the worst excesses of previous generations of these systems. Will the systems be redesigned to not only reign in the excesses but provide added value whereby a socially moral obligation is interwoven into their cores? In the development community, for instance, there is a rising dissent and accompanying disillusionment with the previous mechanisms of financial ‘aid’. The many hidden (or, indeed, not-so-hidden) ‘strings’ attached to international aid creating dependency and collusion with donor states are now only too obvious as those in receipt of such achieve an increased awareness as to the true nature of independent sustainable development.

So, thirdly, what are the alternatives? At DIYNGO we were advised, having reached a stumbling block with regard to finances, to match Corporate Social Responsibility in Industrialised Nations with the needs of those in Developing Nations. Hence, we could envisage a model whereby those in the rich corporations are able to buy a little moral credibility through the support of an organisation such as ourselves perhaps by
providing equipment, financial support or even staff who were oriented towards contributing something towards the global community other than their corporation’s products and/or services. Thus the recipients in Developing Countries receive, for example, reconditioned equipment, finances to develop particular infrastructure or people with certain rare skill sets who could effectively transfer knowledge to appropriate communities. It all seemed like a jolly good idea. We take the need for a wealthy corporation to appear to be doing some good in the world, match it with the needs of less well-off communities and, hey presto, we have a symbiotic relationship between donor and recipient which, theoretically, side-steps the issues concerning the socio-political ‘strings’ of Nation States. Except, when we ran this idea past an admittedly small sample of potential clients in a simple ‘market research’ exercise the whole idea was not at all popular. It does seem as though the assumption that organisations, indeed individuals, wish to express a social responsibility at all, or at least in this way, may be fallacious en masse.

Therefore, fourthly, this brings us to the need to somehow better inform the individuals which make up these corporations, indeed societies at large, that there is something we can all be doing to address the inequities that lie at the heart of a great majority of current world problems. In other words, we require a global education program that attempts to impart the postulated missing ‘soul’ in the underlying capitalistic ethos. After all, it is an ethos founded upon personal, individual well-being with no notion of the need for a society as a whole, indeed even a community, to be thriving if that individual is also to prosper. For, the education process may begin, we are all interdependent: society is a network of mutual interactions forming the web of our lives. This does not mean that we should all become socialists overnight for socialism is not without its ailments also as has been witnessed around the globe and across the centuries already. It can lead to authoritarian regimes at the nation state level that stagnate and never achieve the growth which has to be an essential element of development if the inequities are to be dissipated. And so, we arrive at the need to create a Third Space (Barker, 2008) where we forget the baggage of previous systemic predispositions and create a new direction whereby we may reinvigorate the ailing global financial systems. We combine rather than separate our ideologies. We try to arrive at a consensus through careful diplomacy and an enlightened understanding. More to the point, we need to be honest with ourselves that we cannot continue on this path for much longer. The planet is dying as is, at least, our species.

Finally, we should start to act immediately. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change predicts that we have around twenty or thirty years before we reach a turning point and our own species will start to decline. The International Union for Conservation of Nature continues to publish the Red List showing that untold species are already facing extinction – when will humans be added? Even the World Bank in its Development Report of this year is stating that if we do not act upon a number of suggested initiatives then we may only have around ten years before serious and irreversible damage occurs to our planet. It is now time to conjure up the ghost in the Capitalist machine before it is exorcised along with its current adherents: us.

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1 Only seven out of sixty three people completed the questionnaire possibly, as mentioned by one potential participant, because personal details (name and email address, etc.) were being acquired. Quite why participants felt the need for anonymity from DIYNGO we are not sure. Please see www.diyngo.org and select ‘resources’ for the report.
2 Please see www.timothybarker.com