

УДК 172.261.7

## **AN ECOLOGICAL DEMOCRATIC FAITH AND THE CURRENT ECONOMIC CRISIS**

**Leslie A. Muray**

Curry College, Boston (USA)

This paper builds on my previous work attempting to develop “an ecological democratic faith” from the perspective of Whiteheadian process thought. Historically, democratic theories have been anthropocentric. An ecological democratic faith seeks to develop a non-anthropocentric democratic theory that seeks to institutionalize respect for the dignity and rights of humans and non-humans alike. It seeks not only to act for but to listen to our non-human kin as well. Whiteheadian process thought is uniquely suited for this endeavor. This paper then examines the current economic crisis. It makes specific politico-economic proposals stemming from and congruent with an ecological democratic faith. Influenced by the work of John B. Cobb, Jr., most of these involve strengthening local communities and local banks as well as breaking up the power of large financial institutions.

### **1. Relational Power**

Before exploring the significance of the notion of relational power for developing a Whiteheadian democratic theory, I need to make some introductory remarks.

This paper is the continuation of a life-long interest in democratic theory that in turn is an outgrowth of a deep seated interest in and commitment to human rights rooted in my years growing up under a Stalinist regime in Hungary. Since the period that followed fall of communism, I have been concerned that, for as much as the word “democracy” is bandied about, the term is used loosely and without precision. I am not at all sure that we know what we mean by it. I became engaged in exploration of the term. As an important part of this, I hoped that Hungary and other former Eastern bloc countries, along with countries like South Africa, would embark upon bold, new experiments in political and economic democracy. Although Hungary and most of these countries (with the exception of some of the Republics former Soviet Union) have relatively stable constitutional governments and have had peaceful transfers of power in several elections, they have also adopted neo-liberal economic policies that have created socio-politico-oligarchical elites. With increasing concentrations of economic and political power, buttressed by neo-liberal economic policies, the United States, although to some extent democratic, has also become increasingly oligarchical. The dominance of elites that are oligarchical, one could argue, is an increasingly global phenomenon.

The first characteristic of a process democratic theory that has emancipatory potential with regard to the growing dominance of oligarchies is the idea of

relational power. Process thought develops this notion in contrast to most of the Western tradition, which has defended the concept of unilateral power, power that is "one way" in trying to bring about an effect. It is hierarchical, "top down," and anthropocentric; one of its institutional expressions is patriarchy; some of its typical political manifestations can be seen in authoritarianism, dictatorship, and totalitarianism. Its ultimate sanctification can be found in a vision of an eternal, unchanging, omnipotent God unaffected by the world. There is no better example of unilateral power than the modern corporation. Power is rigidly hierarchical, controlling, domineering «top down», as we can readily see in the position (and the very terminology) of the CEO. The hierarchical, unilateral nature of this power can be seen in huge bonuses CEOs receive and the huge discrepancy between their salaries and those of most of their employees. It is sobering to remember that Benito Mussolini found inspiration and a model for his «corporate state» in the modern corporation!

Unilateral conceptions of power are grounded in a substantialist" view of reality, maintaining that reality consists of discreet, isolated substances that require nothing but themselves and (God) to exist. Relational power, on the other hand, is grounded in "event" thinking. The fundamental unit of reality is an actual occasion of experience fundamentally related to all other occasions of experience. Anything actual at all, from the tiniest energy event to human beings, has some degree of power. No organism can stay alive without some exercise of some degree of power. An actual occasion has **both a receptive** side, receiving data from the past, and an **active** side, deciding how it constitutes itself, deciding how it prehends data from the past and actualizes the possibilities of the moment and of future. If there is a **receptive** as well as an **active** side to all experience, then for process thought power also must have **both a receptive and an active** side. Power is not only the capacity **affect**, to carry out a purpose, but also the capacity to undergo an **effect**, to be acted upon.

Thus, consistent with its vision of a relational and participatory universe, process thought envisions power as relational. Rather than being "one-way", power involves mutuality and reciprocity; it is non-hierarchical. Moreover power is to be exercised persuasively, not just in the sense of making rational arguments but upholding the lure of ideals relevant for particular situations. Instead of dominating like unilateral power, relational power is empowering power. Thus, in both interpersonal relationships, leadership of any sort, and our socio-politico-institutions, relational power is exercised not in hierarchy and domination but in give and take, mutuality, reciprocity, participation, creativity, and in nurturing the communities that in turn embody relational power. As we shall see, this involves seeing our place in the non-human natural world in a different way, being parts of it and needing to listen to its voices.

In process thought, God is the chief exemplification of metaphysical categories. And if God is the chief exemplification of metaphysical categories, then God is the supreme example of relational power. God is supremely relational in the primordial nature as God lures the creatures persuasively

with ideal possibilities to realize themselves in their fundamental interdependence with one another. God is supremely relational in the consequent nature as God feels the feelings of the creatures and preserves them everlastingly with no loss of immediacy.

In asserting that God always act persuasively rather than coercively, process thinkers, following Whitehead, have rebelled against tyrannical images of God. In keeping with this and in being consistent, coherent, and adequate in upholding the freedom of all actualities, process thinkers have maintained that God does not voluntarily relinquish or limit the divine power but rather is "subject to the rules of the game" (is their chief exemplification), much in the manner that constitutional monarchs, presidents, and prime ministers in modern democracies are not above but subject to the laws of their countries. The image of God as a constitutional ruler subject to the laws of the land no less than anyone else is important for the development of a process democratic theory. It is important for the development of what I call a "democratic faith" in a "democratic God."

It is notable that such eminent contemporary scholars of international politics as Joseph S. Nye, Jr., former Dean of the Kennedy School of Government and Assistant Secretary of Defense in the Clinton Administration, who joined the Obama Administration, has advocated a position that bears some resemblance to the idea of relational power. Nye's view of soft power, the exercise of diplomacy, mutuality, and reciprocity instead of the use of brute force had considerable currency in the Clinton Administration and continues to do so with Hilary Clinton and Barack Obama as well as much of the Democratic Party. It remains to be seen whether soft power is genuinely an expression of relational power or a more palatable form of unilateral power.

## **2. The Individual-in-Community**

In moving on to the next feature of a process democratic theory, of an ecological democratic faith, I shall begin with a discussion of the Whiteheadian notion of beauty. In Whiteheadian process thought, the drive toward fulfillment, the experience of beauty, is characteristic of anything actual at all—from the tiniest energy event to atoms and molecules to animals with central nervous systems. Beauty is the delicate balance between harmony and intensity, richness of experience.

Experience, the momentary experiencing of beauty, is the locus of value. Any moment of experience, however rudimentary, is of **intrinsic** value. To be sure, the immediacy and intensity of all actual occasions "perish," becoming "objective data" for the becoming of future occasions. Thus, while any experience is of **intrinsic** value in the immediacy and intensity of the moment, it is also of **instrumental** value as it contributes to richness of experience of ensuing actual occasions.

Experiences are not of equal value. There is an incredible variety in the capacity for "richness of experience," for "intensity of feeling". The ca-

capacity for richness of experience depends on the degree of complexity of organization as “actual occasions of experience” come together, extended in space and time.

Positing the locus of value in the moment experience is to be understood in a relational way. That is to say, the actual occasion arises out of a fundamental web of relationships as it prehends data from the past, the past of the entire universe. This holds true from the tiniest energy event to the complex experiencing of the human self. In the relational universe of Whiteheadian process thought, there is neither *absolute* distinction nor *absolute* identity between the self (or any subjective experience) and “the other,” no *absolute* boundary between the self (or any subjective experience) and the world. The web of relationships is the nurturing (or obstructive) matrix for the richness of experience of the becoming moment.

It is in this manner that process thought situates humans in the non-human natural world while preserving the distinctiveness of human beings (the difference between the human and non-human, human and non-human experience being one of degree not of kind). It also provides a non-anthropocentric grounding for human rights – as well as the rights of non-human animals.

Historically in the Western tradition, human rights have been grounded in the unique dignity that humans have simply by virtue of being human, usually connected to a rationality that is a distinctive characteristic of humans alone. In contrast, process thought posits the notion in the capacity to feel, in the capacity for richness of experience which, as we have seen, is of intrinsic value. Moreover, reason is a feature of experience, present in all actualities in however rudimentary a level. Thus, because any experiencing subject is of intrinsic value, in a loose sense, we can say that it has rights. However, as we have also seen, not all experiences are equal in richness of experience, hence we may assert that while all creatures have rights, they do not have equal rights. Those rights are contextual and intertwined with the fundamental interdependence of all things.

The moment of experiencing is the locus of value yet it arises out of the web of relationships that includes the past of the entire universe. The word *interdependence*, combining *independence* and *interrelatedness*, avoiding the connotations of extreme individualism and unhealthy dependence, is an appropriate way to describe this process of becoming.

Thus, the relational metaphysics of process thought can be described as that of the “individual-in-community”. As with the notion of interdependence, combining independence and interrelatedness, the concept of the “individual-in community” suggests an inseparable link rather than inevitable conflict between the individual and the community. To be sure, conflict may occur. However, as I have mentioned, the individual emerges out of a fundamental web of relationships. The communities out of which we emerge as individuals are a part of us and we a part of them. While individuals have the

capacity to transcend their communities and realize themselves at times in spite of their communities, those communities can enhance or obstruct individual development.

The notion of the self, human and non-human, being an individual-in-community holds true for all actualities, all creatures, human and non-human. Indeed, Whitehead considered the question of the “individual-in-community” to be the religious question. The notion of the “individual-in-community,” which in the case of humans has been called “persons-in-community”<sup>1</sup> by John Cobb and the economist Herman Daly, provides quite a different grounding for democratic theory than do typical modern democratic theories grounded in an individualistic, atomistic view of the self and in a substantialist view of reality. Process thought emphasizes the dignity of the individual an individual and individual self-realization no less than do individualistic democratic theories. However, unlike atomistic democratic theoreticians, process thinkers emphasize the health of the communities out of which the individual emerges and through which she/he realizes herself/himself no less. Process political theoreticians tend to be “communitarian” and “democratic socialist” in their treatment, within their green perspectives. This does not mean that process thinkers are collectivists. Process thought, with its emphasis on the “**individual-in-community**,” offers unique resources in affirming both the distinctiveness of the individual and her/his fundamental relatedness.

If a community profoundly shapes the development of healthy, creative, free individuals, then the elements that foster that kind of creative development need to be examined. Process thinkers through the generations have emphasized the need for people to participate effectively in the decisions that affect their lives. They emphasize the importance of individual responsibility, of taking responsibility for what we do with past and for how we respond to the possibilities of the future, for the persons we become.

A crucial implication for effective participation in the decisions that affect one’s life is the limitation of undue concentrations of power in every overlapping sphere of life, in both institutions and in persons. Politically, this would involve the maximum safeguarding of civil liberties and due process of law. It would include institutional systems of checks and balances. At larger levels of community, it could entail representative forms of government, at smaller levels it could and would encourage direct forms of democratic participation.

Undue concentrations of political power usually go hand in hand with undue concentrations of economic power. For example, transnational corporations and banks (as well as central banks) have undue influence in the politics within and between nations. It is all too typical that the ability to express

---

<sup>1</sup> Herman E. Daly and John B Cobb, Jr., *For the Common Good: Redirecting the Economy toward Community, the Environment, and a Sustainable Future*, Second Edition Updated and Expanded (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994).

one's views is all too dependent on the ability to pay for it (the U.S. Supreme Court recently reaffirmed the view that legally corporations are persons; their right to free speech includes unlimited contributions to political campaigns). The spectrum of political opinion that gets to be heard and read in public is circumscribed by the fact that the media is largely owned by transnational corporations or media moguls. Process political thinkers typically want to limit such concentrations of power.

Process political philosophers usually advocate some form of workers' democracy, workers ownership and management of their places of employment; there cannot be political democracy without economic democracy. Unlike the neoclassical economists, with individualistic, atomistic presuppositions, process thinkers also advocate subsuming economic life to political life, for the health of the community. That does not necessarily imply state control or ownership; it will involve the use of market mechanisms. However, the use of market is not unhampered; it is for the good of the community.

All of this implies limitations on the undue concentration of power in the state, as well as any institution or person, especially, as we have seen, with regard to coercive powers, with regard to civil liberties, due process of law, and the observance of democratic procedures. Nevertheless, there is also positive role for the state (with full critical awareness that the state tends to protect the interests of ruling classes and elites): assuring that the "rules of the game" are observed, that there is fairness, equity, and justice, that all have access to the goods of life. The positive role of the state is to promote the common good, with the maximum participation of all.

At this point, it is helpful to refer to Isaiah Berlin's distinction between "freedom from" and "freedom for." "Freedom from" refers to such things as civil liberties and due process of law, protection from arbitrary state interference in people's lives, i.e. political liberties. This we might call procedural democracy, which in my view is also a part of substantive democracy. "Freedom for," on the other hand, refers to maximum and direct participation in all the areas that affect one's life, political, economic (workers' management), and cultural (direct governance of local schools) – substantive democracy<sup>2</sup>.

In liberal thought as espoused by Berlin in a fashion typical in the West and having virtually official standing in the U.S. (as in the government's official stance on human rights: there are no economic rights), freedom has been conceived only in terms "freedom from." Whitehead as well as most of his philosophical followers have in various ways advocated both "freedom for" and "freedom from" as requisite for the flourishing of the 'individual-in-community.

With very few notable exceptions (Kenneth Cauthen), process thinkers have preferred to deal with the concept of "participation" rather than "equality."

---

<sup>2</sup> Carol C. Gould. *Rethinking Democracy: Freedom and Social Cooperation in Politics, Economy, and Society*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990.

The two need not be seen as antithetical: hierarchies based on privilege of any kind or inhibit effective participation on the part of those in the lower parts of the hierarchy. Surely working toward a society in which there is equal (not synonymous with "sameness") access to power and to the goods of life is a worthy goal. Perhaps the best meaning of equality may be found in the Hungarian political thinker István Bibó: equality was an "equality of dignity." In connection with freedom for, process thinkers have advocated some minimum standard of living in order to be able participate effectively in the decisions that shape peoples' lives. Hunger and poverty are not conducive to such participation. The manner in which such a minimum standard of living is guaranteed would encourage both individual responsibility and serving the "common good."

### **3. Biocracy**

As we have seen, the notion of human dignity is fundamental to human rights and their institutional expression in democracy. In today's world, we need to extend the notion of dignity to include non-human creatures if we are to develop a non- anthropocentric way of understanding democracy, that is to say "biocracy."<sup>3</sup> Positing dignity in sentience, human and non-human, process thought is uniquely suited to this task. Thomas Berry, who coined the term "biocracy," along with Joanna Macy and Arne Ness, make proposals that certainly take steps beyond the typical anthropocentrism of Western democratic theories toward "biocracy." Berry mentions environmental protection legislation that mandates that environmental impact be one of the most important considerations in forging legislation<sup>4</sup>. Arne Naess advocates the idea of an "ecological self." This is the idea that, if the self is a relational self with no *absolute* boundaries between the self and the world, then the community of all living beings is constitutive of its very selfhood. Thus, human beings need to cultivate their capacity to identify with all living beings, their sense of kinship with all living beings<sup>5</sup>.

The concept of "the council of all beings" as described by Pat Fleming and Joanna Macy is very helpful toward developing the idea of biocracy. Fleming and Macy describe "the council of all beings" as a ritual in which, first of all, group exercises are done to remember our bio-ecological history. After this, participants are sent off individually to take on the mask of some aspect of nature (a mountain) or a non-human animal. The person wearing the mask represents the animal or phenomenon depicted by the mask. Sitting in the middle of a circle and taking turns doing so, participants engage in a

---

<sup>3</sup> I am indebted for the idea of "biocracy" to Thomas Berry. See Thomas Berry, "Teilhard in the Age of Ecology," Video Interview (Mystic, Connecticut: Twenty-Third Publications, 1988).

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Arne Ness, "Self-Realization: An Ecological Approach to Being in the World," in John Seed, Joanna Macy, Pat Fleming, Arne Naess, *Thinking Like a Mountain: Towards a Council of All Beings* (Philadelphia, PA: New Society Publishers, 1988), p. 20-22.

give and take between humans and non-humans as humans represent the non-humans. Then, humans as humans receive the powers necessary to stop the destruction of the world<sup>6</sup>. Fleming and Macy eloquently invite us to listen to non-humans even as humans represent them by wearing their masks.

As much as Berry, Naess, Fleming, and Macy contribute to the development of the idea of biocracy, contributions we need to affirm and on which we need to build, I still find a certain paternalism, a kind of "noblesse oblige" towards the non-human natural world that is almost an echo of anthropocentrism. What I mean by this is that in all of these thinkers, it is the activity of humans that is highlighted while non-humans are the passive recipients of the beneficent charitableness of human beings. And this noblesse oblige undermines in subtle ways their very effort to develop a non-anthropocentric biocracy.

While to some degree this may be unavoidable, if, as process thought maintains, the difference between humans and non-humans is one of degree and not of kind, then we need to listen to non-humans in their own voices, in their own terms, in their own integrity. As helpful and important as it may be to represent non-humans by wearing their masks, we need to listen to what non-humans themselves are "telling" us. This is an exceedingly difficult task, to say the least.

One danger, evident in my own rhetoric, is the possibility of so anthropomorphizing non-humans as to blur their "otherness" (that is not absolute), which would certainly run counter to the notion of listening to non-humans in their own voices. Nevertheless, it is possible in my view, to keep stretching ourselves to see the commonalities as well as differences between humans and non-humans.

Another problem, frequently pointed to by defenders of anthropocentrism as clear evidence of human superiority is the distinctiveness of human language. Non-humans cannot speak in clearly, articulated words and sentences through which they convey their thoughts. While that may be so, language is a complex form of communication and non-human animals do communicate; they make sounds, they convey feelings. Even in human communication, non-verbal communication is more basic than the verbal; the nuances of language change with the emotional tone conveyed. And while at times difficult and time consuming, we need to improve in listening to what non-human animals are communicating. This can involve the study of bird song and what it seeks to communicate, as Charles Hartshorne and others have done<sup>7</sup>. It can involve the study of chimpanzees and their learning sign language as Erin McKenna<sup>8</sup> and Nancy R. Howell have done. It certainly in-

---

<sup>6</sup> Pat Fleming and Joanna Macy, "The Council of All Beings" in *Ibid.*, p. 79-90.

<sup>7</sup> Charles Hartshorne, *Born to Sing: An Interpretation and World Survey of Bird Song* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1973).

<sup>88</sup> Erin McKenna, "Pragmatism and Primates," *American Journal of Theology and Philosophy*, Vol.22 No.3, September 2001, p. 183-205.



volves the ability to read the feelings of our pets and the other things they seek to communicate, as those of us with pets know. It may involve howling with wolves, as eloquently described by Jay McDaniel<sup>9</sup>.

A great image of listening to non-humans is provided by the movie *Dances With Wolves*. John Dunbar, the Kevin Costner character, is so attuned to a wild wolf, that after a period of time, he is able to dance with the wolf. Thus, he acquires the Lakota name “Dances With Wolves,” which becomes his new identity.

Listening to what the non-human natural world is telling us includes not only individual non-human animals but larger systems as well. For example, one can learn as I did living in the desert in Arizona for twenty-two years, to tell when it was actually going to rain or whether it was going to be a long winter by looking at the thickness of the clouds, their formations, and the speed of their movement.

As we have seen, the diffusion of power is necessary for the protection of human dignity and its institutionalization in democracy. In the non-human, as well as the human, natural world, we see both the concentration and the diffusion of power. We see concentrations of power in self-organizing systems of greater complexity. We see the diffusion of power in chaos. But, more importantly, I would maintain that we see nature’s version of “checks and balances” in environmental degradation. Whether we look at global warming, the spreading of the Sahara and Gobi deserts, deforestation, air and water pollution, I would ask whether this is the non-human natural world’s way of showing the limits of the human grab for power and domination, of the revolt of the dignity of the constitutive, interdependent actualities that make up non-human natural world?

I am still wrestling with the institutional forms biocracy may take, a project I am hope to be undertaking in the near future.

#### **4. Some Random Ruminations About the Economy**

In this section, I shall engage in some brief, impressionistic ruminations about the economy. They are meant to add «flesh and bones» concreteness to our discussion and to show complexities usually not considered in typical discussions of the issues involved.

First, the issue of sub-prime loans and the resulting real estate collapse. Since at least the end of World War II, conventional wisdom has affirmed the desirability of home ownership. Owning a home was a sign of success, stability, that one had «arrived» – let alone the equity one built up with the ever growing value of the property. During the real estate boom of the early to mid 2000s, I had friends and colleagues who, for fear of being turned down for a mortgage

---

<sup>9</sup> Jay B. McDaniel, “A God Who Loves Animals and a Church That Does the Same,” in Charles Pinches and Jay B. McDaniel, Editors, *Good News for Animals: Christian Approaches to Animal Well-Being* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1993), p. 78-80.

and/or other reasons, persisted in renting than buying a house. According to the long standing conventional wisdom, they were shortsighted if not stupid. Today, they are treated like prescient economic seers.

Second, some observations about the American automobile and its primary locale, the state of Michigan. The automobile industry provides one of the best examples of the modern corporation. American automobile corporations are models of hierarchicalism, of a «top down» mentality. This mind set has been appropriated by other institutions—churches, educational institutions, unions, etc. Decisions and actions are initiated from above complemented by passivity below. There is rigidity at all levels when it comes to change. Since people seem more unwilling to move on account family ties and regional loyalties than they do in other parts of the country, the economy is stagnant, companies knowing that they have their basic work force in reserve.

I do not mean for my remarks to be disparaging, overly, critical, or hurtful. There is much to admire about people in the great rust belt states like Michigan who refuse to move where employment opportunities are more plentiful. They reflect a sense of rootedness, of belonging to a community that is admirable and missing in much of American life (as well as elsewhere). Nevertheless, if things are going to improve, there is a need to break through the rigidity and hierarchicalism and for all concerned to become active subjects with regard to the issues that affect their lives.

Finally, some ruminations about transnational corporations. Since the 1970s, there has been an emphasis in the American automobile industry to buy American. This, needless to say, was in reaction to competition from foreign automobile manufacturers. For many years, especially when I lived in Michigan, I drove American cars—even when I thought Japanese and German cars were better. By the early 90s, I began to wonder if my car was truly an American make—some parts were Japanese, some made in Japan, others in the U.S.. Were any cars truly national anymore or were they products of transnational corporations that know no national loyalty? And if that was the case, what impact did that have on my friends and students who worked for Ford and General Motors?

### **5. Practical Proposals**

Before I put forth my practical proposals, I should note that I am building on John Cobb's distinction between the « virtual » or « financial » economy and the « real » economy. Cobb writes that « in a financial economy, they invest their money chiefly in financial instruments rather than in productive industries » (\*p.123). He also maintains that « as the economy becomes more and more focused on finance, the relation between the financial instruments and the real economy becomes more and more indirect » (Ibid.) The world of the virtual, financial economy is that of speculation while the world of the real economy is that of real capital, manufacturing, equipment. The real economy is controlled by the virtual economy yet, as Cobb

points, owners/investors know increasingly little about the companies in which they have shares, as, for example, those of us who own these companies through a retirement program (\* p.128).

The virtual economy is one that is increasingly centralized globally. This is quite anti-thetical to an ecological democratic faith. It also contradicts a basic tenet of most Whiteheadians, also basic to an ecological democratic faith. If, as we have seen the health and flourishing of individuals is most likely to occur in healthy and flourishing communities, those communities need to be nurtured. It goes without saying that those communities in which individuals are most directly, intimately involved would take priority, although, to be sure, not to the neglect of larger communities. This is very much in line with the principle of subsidiarity, i.e. solving problems at the lowest possible level. One needs to add, with the maximum participation possible.

In keeping with the foregoing, we have seen that process thinkers distrust undue concentrations of power **anywhere, in political and economic life**. Objects of this distrust certainly include the power concentrated and centralized in the financial institutions of the global economy, in the American context best represented by bailed out banks of Wall Street.

Demonstrating the concentration of power in these banks is the slogan: they were «too big too fail,» i.e. too important to be allowed to fail. Moreover, with millions of Americans having pensions and other retirement funds wrapped up in the banks and the stock market, in a certain sense many of us had an indirect complicity in the failure and rescue of these financial institutions.

In comparison, local banks were not considered «too big to fail»; they did not receive the same kind of bail outs as the large banks. Some failed, others were swallowed up by the big ones. Some registered minimal or no losses, a few came aredoing well.

In keeping with the principle of subsidiarity and an ecological democratic faith, I would begin my response to our current economic crisis with the following proposals. Begin with the communities that are closest to us. If we approach the crisis in that fashion, we need to begin by nurturing local and regional banks. This would entail investing in local banks as well as extending tax credits to them. Moreover, if we are going to enact these proposals in ways that foster biocracy, at the very minimum, we need to encourage banks to invest in and lend money to «green businesses.» We also need to find some way to institutionalize listening to the non-human natural world in our economic life. This may involve educational programs for the entire community about ways of listening to the non-human natural world. It may involve bank regulators and directors receiving similar training. How to do this without being coercive is the question.

By themselves, these endeavors are hardly adequate or sufficient to make a dent. They need to be accompanied by the break up of undue concentrations of power in the large banks of Wall Street (and elsewhere). I

am not advocating doing away with them, just breaking them into smaller units, with power diffused.

This is hardly a new idea in the history of the United States of America. « Trust Busting, » the legal break up of large trusts and monopolies by the government was a basic tenet of the Progressive movement in the late nineteenth, early twentieth centuries ; it was a fundamental policy of President Theodore Roosevelt (1901-1909), a Republican, and Woodrow Wilson (1913-1921), a Democrat.

A focal point of the Progressive movement was distrust of undue concentrations of power, whether political or economic. Politically, they advocated increasing citizen participation through the referendum and recall and the direct election of U.S. Senators as well as breaking the power of political bosses. In economic life, as we have seen, they sought to break up the power of monopolies. In addition to arguing against undue concentrations of power, they also argued that the break up of monopolies was necessary to insure real competition in the market place.

The Progressives did not believe in an unhampered market. In fact, they introduced many of the regulatory measures that have been dismantled over the last thirty years,. They also enacted the first measures for the conservation of the environment. In many ways, American Progressives paralleled the (non-Marxist) reformist Social Democrats of Western Europe.

Part of the break up of the big centralized banks would also involve limiting executive bonuses. CEOs and other managerial types would receive salaries no higher than that of the President of the United States – \$400,000. They would not receive bonuses for laying people off in order to enhance the company's profits. Rather, they would receive bonuses of no more than \$100,000 for saving and expanding environmentally sensitive jobs—not as something makeshift but jobs that provide valuable and meaningful work.

In keeping with an ecological democratic faith, I would try to make sure that there is fairness and justice in banking regulation. These would need to be worked out by the communities involved with maximum possible participation. The most basic principle is that the economy exists for the good of the community. This, most emphatically, does not entail state socialism (some prefer to call it state capitalism, e.g. Trotsky, Djilas, etc.) nor the individualism of laissez-faire capitalism. It does entail an economy for the common good not private aggrandizement of a few individuals.

Bank regulators and directors would need to be chosen democratically, with no undue influence exercised by any particular group. The regulators and directors would come from all walks of life. They probably would need training in banking. This training would not be mere socialization into the ways of the banking industry but would include a variety of points of view.

Once again, at the national level ways would need to be found to train regulators and bank directors in listening to the non-human natural world and ways to institutionalize this listening.

Following the lead of John Cobb, I would urge the establishment of a National Bank to replace the privately owned Federal Reserve. In keeping with my desire to nurture local banks, following the lead of the state of North Dakota, the state bank of which has been quite successful, I would encourage the establishment of state banks.

Another part of my proposal would be for a national and international bodies to explore how much of the economies of individual countries are under the control national entities, how much by transnationals. Or are they so intertwined that one cannot tell the difference? National sufficiency and «genuine free trade,» of one's surplus goods, from a position of strength would be encouraged.

## **6. Conclusion**

Building on previous work on an ecological democratic faith, I have attempted to advance some proposals towards meeting the current economic crisis. They may seem both modest and unrealistic.

Yet, I would contend that the election of Barack Obama and the hope so evident in the crowds that gathered to hear his acceptance speech and at his Inauguration, were in part inspired by the dissatisfaction with seemingly remote, undue concentrations of power so evident in the economic collapse. One could argue that Obama's aura began to be tarnished with his appointment to high office those (Geitner and Summers) who were partly responsible for the crisis and most especially their and his defense of huge CEO bonuses. Although one could trace it to other roots, including racism, the Tea Party movement received its greatest impetus from this seeming alliance between Wall Street and the incoming Democratic Administration. Although ideologically markedly different, I cannot help but wonder if there is not some common ground between some energized Obama supporters and some disenchanted conservatives.

In the midst of the economic crisis, the non-human natural world has fallen into not so benign neglect. According to recent polls in the United States, denial of global warming is growing. People still think in either/or terms when it comes to jobs vs. the environment and, not surprisingly, an increasing majority choose jobs. These phenomena compound the challenges before us.

The words of a Cree Prophecy summarize the enormity of the challenge of our current economic crisis: «Only after the last tree has been cut down, only after the last river has been poisoned, only after the last fish has been caught, only then will you find that money cannot be eaten».

*Об авторе:*

ЛЕСЛИ А. МЮРЕЙ – доктор философии, профессор Карри колледжа, Бостон (США). E-mail: [lmurray@post03.curry.edu](mailto:lmurray@post03.curry.edu)