

material world will come to be regarded as sacred, thus erasing the dichotomy between the material and the spiritual.

I have no need or desire to argue with him about the validity of his philosophical and spiritual insights. What bothers me is that he makes these views central to the goals of his transitional economics proposals—to the point of choosing “Sacred Economics” as his book’s title—when his eminently practical proposals for transforming our financial operating system can stand on their own merits in service to a society merely looking for a way out of the traps it has set for itself.

Eisenstein identifies the many current local initiatives that seem to be leading to a self-organizing transition to a reemergence of harmony with Nature. By and large these efforts spring from an educated elite, or from indigenous populations who have retained important connections to Nature. In so doing he neglects the tremendous weight of a seven-billion strong global population dependent on the existing interlocking web of the corporate/government technostucture hell-bent on a lemming-like trajectory. He neglects the fact that the majority of the world’s population can feel their subjugation but lack the wit or the conceptual tools to do anything about it. Such people cling in desperation to the known.

Finally, the notion that the material world will come to be regarded as sacred (thus erasing the dichotomy between the material and the spiritual) will be regarded by the billions-strong adherents of the ancient messianic religions as not only a threat to their beliefs but as a proposal for the triumph of secular humanism. Ironically, they will be strange bedfellows with those who—fearing theocracy—hold freedom of religion to be a most treasured tenet of the Bill of Rights. I worry that many who would otherwise be open to his practical proposals will reject them out of hand because of these fears.

Nevertheless, I must confess that I’ve found personal inspiration in being immersed in the notion of the importance of giving, and that his stress on the miraculous sacredness of our world gives his book a human warmth which it would otherwise lack. With some regret, I guess what I’m saying is—throw out Eisenstein’s baby—but drink deeply of the bathwater.

“SACRED ECONOMICS”AMAZON REVIEW—8/19/11

Charles Eisenstein’s recent book, “Sacred Economics,” is the book I’ve been waiting for. Finally, a brilliant scholar has produced a comprehensive and prescriptive vision for a future that promises to escape the dystopian path humanity is now embarked upon, although not without prompting my caveats.

Lucidly written, the first part of the book explains the increasingly dysfunctional workings of the grow-or-die financial economy in great (and often reiterative) detail. For some, this will be tough sledding because his analysis undercuts the Chicago School of Economics ideology that is constantly beaten into our brains by the mainstream media. The material he integrates is abstract with many independent variables.

He makes crystal clear what some of us have known for a long time about the roots of poverty, climate change, environmental destruction, wealth concentration, the erosion of democracy, and the destruction of the human spirit under corporate rule. He carefully and logically deconstructs the arguments put forward by the spokespeople for the present system.

More importantly, he combs the entire history of the world for ideas and practices that have shown us the way out of the traps set by a money system based on artificial, contrived scarcities and the theft of the commons. In Chapter 17 he puts all these together as a symbiotic interconnected program for a peaceful transition to a stable, sustainable economy in harmony with Nature. If you find the previous chapters to be preaching to the choir (the book is 469 pages long) go directly here and then backtrack to pick up the pieces.

But he doesn’t stop here, and that’s where I think he begins to get himself in trouble. He questions the “meta-Stories” that we tell ourselves about who we are. I would paraphrase the essential point of his inquiry as, “What underlies the evolution of the present inhumane and ultimately destructive economic system?” He identifies the biblical dominionist vision of human “Ascent”, the loss of our sense of universal interconnectedness, the transfer of the wealth of the commons into private property. He counters the view that—as a “rational actor”—man is innately selfish with the proposition that what I do to you I also do to myself. He decries our general neglect of the importance of qualitative experience such as the production and appreciation of beauty

So far so good. But at this point, his moral philosopher self takes over from his scholarly economist self. He proposes the eventual transition to a moneyless “gift economy” free of commodification and quantification. He holds that such economies free us from anxiety about scarcity when we have confidence that our freely given gifts will be returned with gifts that will satisfy our needs. This will strike many as an unrealistically sanguine view of human nature. We are an inherently unpredictable animal capable of schadenfreude or misanthropy unrelated to economic injustice. He goes even further to hold that the