

## Money and Nature

*'...cyanobacteria, masters of the world...cyanobacteria, it's the highest level of evolution...  
...why?...because they live off carbon dioxide...plentiful, available...they live off sunlight as a source  
of energy...plentiful, available from the very beginning...water, and that's all...they use water, H<sub>2</sub>O,  
for photosynthesis, they take the hydrogens away and put it with the carbon to make their food...but  
if you take hydrogens away from water, what do you get?...you have oxygen left...now these bacteria  
can move anywhere, they can go anywhere because water is everywhere, and every place they go  
they make oxygen bubbles, so they change the world...they run the planet...we think we run the  
planet but we wouldn't run it for long without food and they are the ultimate food supply...and  
when you look at the plants around here, all this vegetation, the reason it's green is because the  
relatives of the cyanobacteria are inside those plant bodies...'* Lynn Margulis 'Symbiotic Earth'

How do you put a price on that? How do you put a price on every breath you take?

Money devalues everything. Money, as used in capitalist economics, pretends to give an objective value for 'goods and services' by using the simple algorithm 'make it or acquire it as cheaply as you can, sell it for as much as you can, keep most or all of the profits for yourself'. Economists dress this up with fancy equations and 'invisible forces' but that's the bottom line.

The problems with this supposed 'objectivity' arise because all monetary transactions involve 'natural systems' in some way, whether it's raw materials, waste disposal, the actions of unseen organisms, or even the ulcers in the stomach of the Wall Street trader. The covid pandemic and climate change are both examples of natural systems in action and they are forcing us to re-think our relationship to natural systems and how they work.

The most up to date and comprehensive description of how natural systems work and evolve is provided by the work of Lovelock and Margulis through the radical insights of Gaia science. The natural systems of 'Gaia nature' are complex, dynamic systems with multi-levelled, interwoven and interdependent relationships and communities which give the systems resilience and dynamic stability over time, and these systems exist within larger systems at all scales from a single cell to the entire planet. Think for a moment of a woodland ecosystem and imagine all the animals and plants and insects and fungi and bacteria, all systems within themselves and all interacting with each other to create the woodland ecosystem which itself is interacting with all the other systems around it. The subtleties and complexities of such a system are too many and varied to be quantifiable, so any attempt at a monetary value for the woodland is bound to be a 'devaluation'.

In tackling climate change we face the same problem. Progress to 'net zero' is slow because no government or enterprise wants to 'lose money' by the changes they make, and many are even looking for ways to continue making profits through 'green capitalism'. We are shackled by our habit of thinking of everything in terms of its monetary value. Gaia nature doesn't run on money, it doesn't need money, it hasn't needed money during its 3,600 million years of spectacular evolution. About 300 years ago we invented our current economic valuation system and since then it's been all about money. That's the real challenge, the real 'transformational change' we need to make. We can start by recycling the accumulated global wealth made at the expense of the climate and biodiversity degradation and design our community systems so they work like a woodland ecosystem. We can reach net zero within ten years if we re-build local self-reliant, symbiotic and sustainable human communities where everybody feels they truly belong and where, thanks to the cyanobacteria who really run the planet, they can breathe easily.