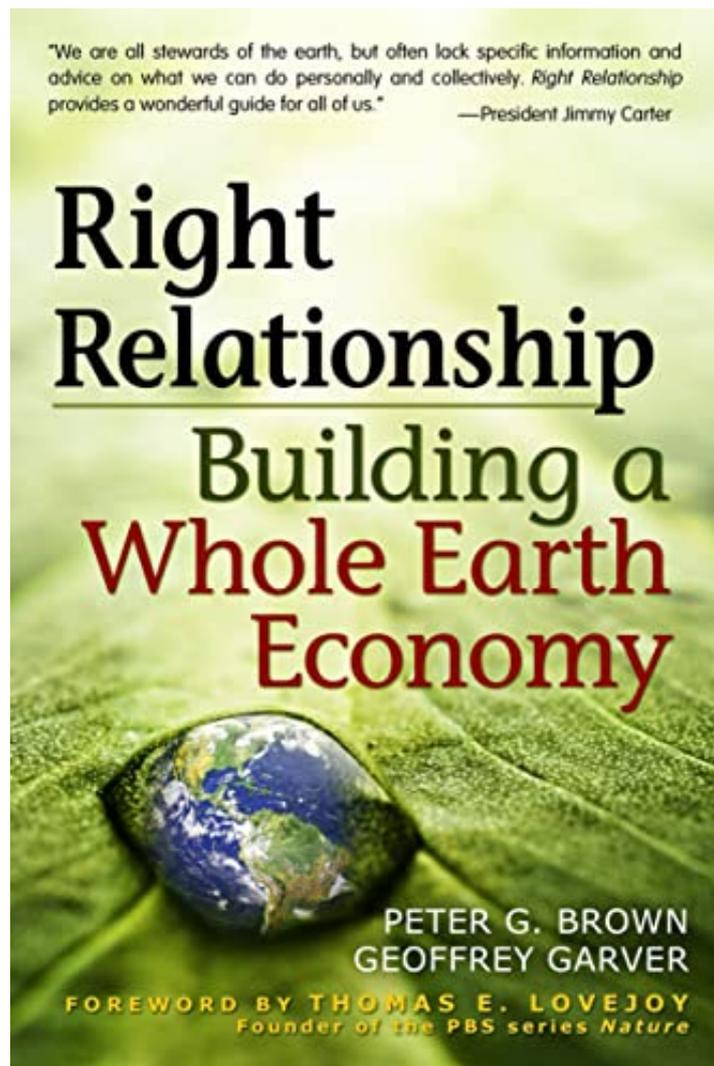


Right Relationship: Building a Whole Earth Economy

by

Peter G. Brown



DOWNLOAD E-BOOK

Synopsis

“We are all stewards of the earth, but often lack specific information and advice on what we can do . . . [This] provides a wonderful guide for all of us.” —President Jimmy Carter Our current economic system—which assumes endless growth and limitless potential wealth—flies in the face of the fact that the earth’s resources are finite. The result is increasing destruction of the natural world and growing, sometimes lethal, tension between rich and poor, global north and south. Trying to fix problems piecemeal is not the solution. We need a comprehensive new vision of an economy that can serve people and all of life’s commonwealth. Peter G. Brown and Geoffrey Garver use the core Quaker principle of “right relationship”—interacting in a way that is respectful to all and that aids the common good—as the foundation for a new economic model. *Right Relationship* poses five basic questions: What is an economy for? How does it work? How big is too big? What’s fair? And how can it best be governed? Brown and Garver expose the antiquated, shortsighted, and downright dangerous assumptions that underlie our current answers to these questions, as well as the shortcomings of many current reform efforts. They propose new answers that combine an acute awareness of ecological limits with a fundamental focus on fairness and a concern with the spiritual, as well as material, well-being of the human race. Brown and Garver describe new forms of global governance that will be needed to get and keep the economy in right relationship. Individual citizens can and must play a part in bringing this relationship with life and the world into being

Sort review

“Bearing witness to a right relationship between people and nature, Brown and Garver provide better advice for an ecologically sustainable and socially just economy than all the Nobel laureates in economics combined.”—Richard B. Norgaard, Professor of Energy and Resources, University of California, Berkeley “This book deserves to sell a million copies. The questions asked—and answered—in *Right Relationship* make a vastly more important contribution to our future than analytical models for maximizing GDP.”—Herman Daly, Professor, School of Public Policy, University of Maryland, and winner of the 1996 Right Livelihood Award “The need for radical new ideas, not just reform, to reconstitute the existing economic system has never been more urgent. This monumental book makes a compelling case for the ‘right’ relationship between human activity and the natural world as the basis for the kind of model that is essential to put us on the pathway to a secure and sustainable future. It is imperative reading for all policy makers and the people on whose participation and support they depend.”—Maurice Strong, former Under Secretary-General and Special Advisor to the Secretary-General of the United Nations “Out of the rich Quaker tradition of personal commitment to peace, equality, and justice comes this powerful call to transform our relationship to the earth and its commonwealth of life. In recognizing the inherent connections between ecological health, social well-being, and a

moral economy, the authors have provided, for Quakers and non-Quakers alike, light amid the darkness.”—Curt Meine, conservationist and author of *Aldo Leopold: His Life and Work*“Right Relationship offers up a welcome and needed change to the technocratic and ethically empty programs that have dominated the sustainability challenge. At the same time the book grounds its arguments in practical terms that can be enacted into new forms of governance and social behavior.”—John R. Ehrenfeld, Executive Director, International Society for Industrial Ecology, and author of *Sustainability by Design*“The challenge mankind faces of turning around our planetary emergency will require a revolution as enormous as the agricultural revolution ten thousand years ago. Our only chance for effecting this transformation in the basic ways we do business with the planet is for a critical mass of the population to ‘get it.’ Right Relationship lays out the case as comprehensively and compellingly as any work on the subject that has come to my attention.”—Alex Shoumatoff, Contributing Editor, *Vanity Fair*, and author/editor of *DispatchesFromTheVanishingWorld.com*“This book looks at the root causes of our accelerating ecological problems. It should be read by politicians, business leaders, the public, and above all our youth. It is they who have to face the consequences of past actions. Reading this book, I hope they will unite and speak with one voice for economic and institutional change to create a right relationship between humans and our planet.”—Helen R. Hughes, first Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment, New Zealand“Right Relationship is the right book at the right time. It is a compass directing us toward a life-centered economy that reflects our highest values.”—David Orr, Paul Sears Distinguished Professor of Environmental Studies and Politics, Oberlin College“Right Relationship is absolutely right: we need to redesign our economic system so that our relationship to life trumps our relationship to profit. Peter Brown and his colleagues show us how this can be done. Everyone who wants a better world should read this book.”—Peter Barnes, author of *Capitalism 3.0*“To reclaim modern economics from the gospel of infinite growth and an idolatry of the market is to be reminded of the wisdom of Aquinas who noted that what is required for genuine happiness is sufficiency of material goods and virtuous action. This book provides an important road map for virtuous action in building a new civilization of love and an economy of well-being built on the pillars of the four virtues of western civilization, which Plato defined as courage, moderation, justice, and wisdom.”—Mark Anielski, author of *The Economics of Happiness: Building Genuine Wealth*; CEO, Anielski Management; and Adjunct Professor, University of Alberta School of Business“In 1942 Aldo Leopold wrote, ‘Our whole cultural structure is built of non-durable materials which will sag as the land weakens.’ This persuasive and compelling book elaborates on this theme: a weakened and sagging land. But it offers us hope with an innovative framework for change—a new story. Brown and Garver envision a global community, a whole earth economy with a new kind of grounding and understanding, bringing science and ethics together.”—Nina Leopold Bradley, Director, The Aldo Leopold Foundation“This book is a blessing. Basing their ideas on the fundamentals of the way the earth actually works, Brown and Garver lead us on pathways of respect toward a mutual flourishing of humans and nature. We humans can elect an abundant future rather than

devouring the livelihood of our grandchildren as current economics demand.”—Paul Heltne, Director, Center for Humans and Nature“This is a book for our times. It offers a blueprint for the way forward out of the ecological and economic upheavals wreaked by the relentless pursuit of economic expansion. As we consider the prospect for humanity’s ability to avoid catastrophic change to earth’s life support-systems and achieve economic and social stability, the authors’ proposals for a new global governance framework, including a global reserve, are spot on.”—Janine Ferretti, Chief of Environment Division, Inter-American Development Bank, and former Executive Director, North American Commission for Environmental Cooperation“A just, resilient, and secure future for the earth and its habitants will require a shift in human values and a sense of shared responsibility for finding ways to live within ecological limits. Right Relationship provides clear analysis and provocative solutions that should resonate with all who seek an economy that reverses course from its current dangerous trajectory.”—Adam Koniuszewski, Chief Operating Officer, Green Cross International“How is the international community going to solve the dilemma of relying on economic growth as the answer to poverty in the world, even though it is clear that ecological pressures due to unlimited growth are already severe and accelerating? Right Relationship provides a thoughtful set of options for creating an economy built on new answers to this pressing problem.”—Sheila Abed, Chair, International Union for the Conservation of Nature Commission on Environmental Law, and founder and Executive Director, Paraguayan Environmental Law and Economics Institute--This text refers to an alternate kindle_edition edition.Excerpt. © Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved.Moving from Wrong to Right Relationship“BEARING WITNESS” IS THE Quaker term for living life in a way that reflects fundamental truths. Bearing witness is about getting relationships right. The group of Quakers in the eighteenth century who built a movement to end slavery were bearing witness to the truth that slavery was wrong. Yet bearing witness to right relationships is not limited to Quakers. It is something done by inspired people of all faiths and cultures when they live life according to cherished values built on caring for other people and being stewards of the earth’s gifts. The mass movement to end apartheid in South Africa, Rachel Carson’s triggering of the environmental movement in the 1960s, and the campaign of Mothers Against Drunk Driving to make roads safer are just a few examples of people coming together to bear witness to what they knew was right.The global economy today is overwhelming the ability of the earth to maintain life’s abundance. We are getting something terribly wrong. At this critical time in history, we need to reorient ourselves in how we relate to each other and to the earth’s wonders through the economy. We need a new mass movement that bears witness to a right way of living on our finite, life-giving planet.Right RelationshipOver just the last two decades, science has radically altered its view of the arrangement both of life and of nonliving components of the earth. New understandings are emerging that place relationship at the center. Biology and physics are moving away from a “reductionist” view of function, in which the activity of a living cell or an ecosystem, for example, is explained by being reduced to its parts, rather than including the relationship between those parts as essential to our understanding. Today scientists are

admitting that this three-hundred-year-old scientific doctrine is far too simplistic, and are finding that physical substances work and exist in terms of highly complex, interdependent, and changeable contexts and relationships. So, for example, the relationships between genes in the human body, rather than only their individual functions, are the key to the countless ways that human genes can produce genetic traits and characteristics. We are now learning that relationship is the key to the survival of our species on the social and political level, as well. This book, then, is about relationship writ large, and about how to move to right relationship from wrong relationship in our individual and collective economic lives. A quick story of one set of relationships operating on our planet helps illustrate this more sophisticated scientific understanding. In its natural state, oil, created over eons from organic matter by volcanic heat and compression, is found almost entirely within the earth's crust; that is its natural relationship with the planet. By the same token, most forms of life can only exist within the biosphere; the thin membrane of plants, animals, and microorganisms and their life support systems at or near the earth's surface constitutes habitat for virtually all life. Life on earth also exists in a spatial relationship to the atmosphere, which must contain gases also arranged in a particular relationship—not too much carbon dioxide, plenty of nitrogen and oxygen, only minute amounts of other gases. Finally, all life forms need access to a highly particular relationship between only two simple and very plentiful gases: hydrogen and oxygen. Water, so necessary to life, is in fact a relationship between those two gases. It is also found primarily on top of the earth's crust or only a short distance beneath it or in the atmosphere above it. These relationships can equally easily be discerned to be "wrong" if the spatial configuration of each component is seriously disturbed, just as a gene sequence cannot express itself if it does not have the necessary position in the genome and the necessary relationship with certain proteins.³ Right now, one of the largest industrial projects in the planet's history is located in western Canada. Development of the Alberta tar sands is a massive attempt to alter the relationships of the substances normally found below the earth with those on it. In this case, oil is brought from beneath the crust along with the sand it permeates and placed in relationship to the ecosystems found on the surface: forests, rivers, wetlands, and lakes. Once on the surface, the oil enters into a relatively permanent set of new relationships with air and water, both in Alberta where it is mined, and also when it is used in vehicles and heating plants in the chain of refineries and users that spread out from it, as far west as China and as far south as Texas. The immense Athabaska River, adapted over millennia and nourishing the boreal forest, enters into a long-term new set of relationships, too. To flush oil from the sands, the river is drained, boiled, forced through the oil-drenched sands, and then deposited in enormous tailing ponds, where the oil's poisonous hydrocarbons are supposed to "settle." The life-giving water of the Athabaska is removed from any use by life forms ever again, barring the discovery of some new, extraordinary technology. This alteration of relationships transforms the thousands of square miles devoted to tar sands development into a huge, toxic graveyard of former life, with a stench of sulfur and hot asphalt that can be smelled from far away. The surface of the earth is stripped of all animal or plant habitat. In the

surrounding area, pus-filled boils, cancers, and other lethal diseases and birth defects in the fish, animal, and human population are now being documented.¹ But not only are ecological relationships affected. Tar sands development also affects social relationships among people. Tens of thousands of workers have migrated to the few towns and many work camps on the site. The crime rate in the towns and cities most affected, Fort McMurray and Fort Chipewyan, and Edmonton and Calgary, has risen, as have homelessness, the cost of living, and prostitution. Human casualties from drug use, alcohol, highway accidents, and the rigors of shift work on a frontier are also escalating.⁴ And these are only the impacts at the beginning of the chain. Once shipped from Alberta, tar sands oil will power air conditioners in deserts, furnaces in the Arctic, and many cars, trucks, and jets. It will serve as the raw material for a vast array of synthetic chemicals and fertilizers. This single industrial project even affects Canada's international relationships, as it makes the nation's compliance with emissions reductions in the Kyoto Protocol virtually impossible. Demand for Alberta's oil will be driven by an international economy that is racing ahead in pursuit of endless growth and wealth accumulation. Alberta tar sands development, along with many other modern industrial developments such as the Three Gorges dam in China or even the war in Iraq, are clear examples of "wrong relationship." In this book we expand the term "right relationship" from its early Quaker use to give it a more universal meaning that includes contemporary science and has roots in diverse cultural and religious traditions. Right relationship provides a guiding ethic for people wishing to lead fulfilling lives as creative and integrated participants in human society and the commonwealth of life as a whole. It is akin to what some would call "sustainability," though it goes much deeper. Right relationship offers a guidance system for functioning in harmony with scientific reality and enduring ethical traditions. In the 1940s, conservation biologist Aldo Leopold, reflecting on what he had come to see as the next stage in human moral development, created a useful definition of right relationship. When working out what he called the land ethic, he explained that "A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise."² Many volumes have since been written on the philosophy of ecology, but this simple statement has become the touchstone of the ecological worldview. Leopold's ethic gains strength when enhanced with affirmations of the inherent value of human and other life, as exemplified in Albert Schweitzer's powerful idea of "reverence for life."³⁵ Replacing the term "stability" with "resilience" reflects the current scientific understanding of relationships. Leopold's ethic applies, as well, to the integrity, resilience, and beauty of human communities. How the ethic is understood in practice depends, of course, on the type of community. Hence, with only one alteration, his ethic becomes a practical guide for differentiating between right and wrong relationship both in human society and in the entire community of life of which humans are a part: "A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, resilience, and beauty of the commonwealth of life. It is wrong when it tends otherwise." A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, resilience, and beauty of the commonwealth of life. It is wrong when it tends otherwise. It is quite possible to choose right relationships and the common good. Many

individuals are already doing so, as are many communities and a few societies. The problem the world is currently facing, however, is that in most of our modern societies the majority of people are actively urged, even forced, to choose wrong relationships, such as those typified by the Alberta tar sands project. Greed and the constant stimulation of new desires that feed it, until quite recently regarded in most societies as sinful or at least unpleasant, have increasingly become acceptable, even glorified. Simultaneously, modern industrial activity has embraced a pathological gigantism, increasing corporate consolidations and ruthlessly crushing the small-business players, as well as the natural systems on which all economic activity depends. In short, a pursuit of wrong relationships is the prevailing trend of our times. The signs are now well known: climate change, overpopulation, loss of topsoil and fresh water, increasing rates of species extinction, deforestation, imperiled coral reefs, unstoppable invasive species, toxic chemicals that remain for eons in the environment, persistent human poverty and hunger, and an increasingly inflated, unstable world financial system and globalizing economy. And we only begin the list.

6 Right relationship with life and the world is both a personal and a collective choice, but it is a choice that we must make. It can support and inspire people struggling to find a foundational base for the development of productive societies and a healthy human–earth relationship. Opting for healthy human and ecological communities is a decision we can make that will require us to find new ways to live and to run our economies. Of course, “right relationship” is simply another way of expressing similar precepts found in many of the world’s religious and spiritual traditions. The reductionist science of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries transformed ethical ideas by removing, for many people, their theological foundations. Now, the relationship science of the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries is beginning to change human perceptions of reality, particularly in terms of human duties to the other life forms with which we share life’s prospect.

The Commonwealth of Life To move from wrong to right relationship, we need to answer the question: related to what? To answer this question we have chosen a term that stresses interdependence—commonwealth. It is typically used to describe a political community established to promote the common good, rather than only the interests of individuals or a particular class of people. Political commonwealths derive from the roots of the word: “common” and “wealth”—that is, wealth is seen as something to be allocated equitably in society, to be shared in common. The traditional idea of a commonwealth stresses the shared features of the community and interdependence of its members. For people, relationships with other humans or with natural communities bring in notions of mutual respect and fairness that are reflected, for example, in universally recognized moral principles like the Golden Rule. The commonwealth of life extends these notions of common features, fair sharing, and interdependence to the entire community of living beings on the earth. The “common wealth” in this community of life on the earth is now clearly the evolutionary heritage and destiny that people share with other life forms. A whole earth economy works for all of life’s commonwealth. Hence the subtitle of this book.

7 Nearly all life on the earth has been made possible by the power of the sun, which over eons has fueled the creation of living structures of increasing complexity

and interdependence. These range from single-cell organisms to elephant, honeybee, or human societies, as well as the intertwined communities of plants, animals, insects, and other biota that constitute a forest. In the commonwealth of all life, the actions of each individual member or species affect the entire commonwealth, however small the result might be. We human beings are now in a position to have far greater impact on the commonwealth of life than most of the other life forms with which we share the planet. Therefore we have the responsibility and privilege to consider other beings and ecosystems when we engage in any sort of social action, including an economy. Our actions must embody an ethic of appreciating, husbanding, and sharing the earth's bounty.

An Economy in Right Relationship

Our species has arrived at its present precarious condition through a history of development driven, in part, by economic relationships and interactions. But though it has facilitated convenience in material living over the centuries, building and maintaining human societies has often had disastrous effects on human and natural communities—the ruin of the Mayan, Roman, and Easter Island civilizations are examples. By objective measures, the kind of globalized economy that has seized the world since World War II is one of the most disastrous of all. Many of the earth's key life-support systems are in rapid decline.⁴ Far more catastrophic collapses are likely to hit human and ecological communities in the near future, and the long-run prospect is dire indeed unless a shift from wrong to right relationships becomes part of human culture.⁸

The postwar financial success of a globalized economy has led to the continuing expansion of finance and consumption and to prosperity for hundreds of millions of people, but it has also trapped the nations of the world in a relentless pursuit of economic growth with no thermostat or shutoff valve. Especially since the end of the Cold War and the easing of any threat of a competing ideology, an increasingly unregulated global capitalistic economy, as developed most enthusiastically in the United States, has dismantled decades-old institutions and structures that had previously succeeded at more evenly distributing prosperity and reducing market abuses.⁵

The current system operates on the assumption that the earth's environment is a subset of the human economy, and that the earth belongs to humans. If these are the assumptions, it makes sense to transfer as much of the earth's natural capital as possible into the engines of the industrial economy. These assumptions, though, are fantastically at odds with scientific reality; human culture and its economic goals are, in pure scientific fact, a subset of the earth's environment and resources, and humanity is only one of millions of species that depend on them. Like putting water into the tar sands, placing the human economy above the well-being of the natural world creates a lethal, poisonous wrong relationship. So how can people shift from an economy based on greed and unquestioned growth to a whole earth economy that is based on right relationship with the commonwealth of life?⁹

Five Questions in Search of Right Relationship

Five key questions, and their answers, chart a path to putting the economy in right relationship with life's commonwealth: What is the economy for? How does it work? How big is too big? What is fair? How should it be governed? The balance of this introduction offers an analysis of each question, with a summary of the "wrong relationship" problem to be solved and a preview of answers based on

right relationship. Question #1: What is the economy for? What are people aiming for, individually and collectively, in the myriad interdependent transactions that make up the economy? Most leaders in finance, business, government, and think tanks say that the global economy's purpose is to enhance human well-being by constantly maintaining economic growth. They assume, despite having little or no serious argument or data, that more consumption and economic activity will result in greater well-being. Yet this answer makes no sense. To begin with, in mainstream economic terms, growth is not measured in terms of benefits, but simply keeps track of overall economic activity in terms of exchanges of money. Many such exchanges create negative side effects, such as pollution, but money spent on cleaning up the resulting pollution is measured as positive growth—and hence adds to dominant measures like Gross Domestic Product (GDP). So, for example, the current economic model sees the money spent cleaning up the Exxon Valdez oil spill as an increase in GDP and therefore beneficial. Similarly, when a person suffers a fatal car accident, the economic exchanges, in terms of ambulances, insurance agents, funeral homes, and so forth, increase GDP and are seen as positive.¹⁰ The current purpose of the economy—providing ever-increasing wealth, with ever-increasing growth—means that cash incomes can rise while actual wealth falls, as measured by natural capital such as soil, timber, oil reserves, and clean water. Making money often demands the one-time, windfall liquidation of centuries-old natural support systems such as forests or fisheries, or even older works of nature such as the Canadian tar sands. In addition, GDP growth contains no measure of distribution, so inequity, poverty, and outright starvation often can, and do, rise at the same time that overall economic activity increases. Lastly, many studies worldwide have demonstrated that after certain basic needs are met, it is one's relative wealth—how folks compare to others, not an absolute amount of wealth accumulation—that determines much of the self-perception of happiness. In “advanced” (or, perhaps, “overdeveloped”) societies, trying to improve well-being and happiness through growth is folly on a treadmill, since people cannot all be wealthier than each other. These problems are symptoms of an economy in wrong relationship. Right relationship, by contrast, is built, in large part, on respect for all life—the kind of respect that is inherent in the Golden Rule, fair play, and other ethical principles that people from across the world's religions and cultures learn as children. Once the economy is understood as being embedded in the living, dynamic world that surrounds it, its purposes become clear: that is, to maintain the integrity, resilience, and beauty of life's commonwealth. The human economy is our way of provisioning ourselves. Hence for humans this means providing for the well-being of individual people, households, communities, and nations. It also means providing for the health and vitality of the finite ecological community in which we live—our diverse and finite earth. Moving away from an economy based on wrong relationships does not spell economic doom. Rather, it creates opportunities for truly rich and fulfilling lives for all.¹¹ Question #2: How does the economy work? The prevailing way of thinking about how the economy works is to imagine that the economy is the box in which social interactions, ecosystems, and their resources are contained. The current economic order has a wrong

relationship with how the real economy of this planet works. First, it assumes that the earth is subsidiary to the economy. Second, it mistakes a measure of wealth—money—for wealth itself. Third, it does not know how to think intelligently about the by-products of economic activity that are not the desired outputs—what we typically call waste.

How Does the Earth Work?

In a typical mainstream economics textbook, the economy is represented by a circular flow diagram. It depicts the production and consumption of goods and services without regard to the components of the earth or life's commonwealth needed to produce them. In fact, about a century ago economists stopped considering any concern for the adequacy of such resources as food and energy. Mainstream economics today proceeds, with rare exception, with no reference to the laws of physics, chemistry, or biology. To understand how a human economy actually functions, it must be conceived of as being embedded in, and also a major determinant of, the complex systems whose relationships make up the earth's ecosphere.⁶ This requires a basic scientific understanding of how the planet works, which in turn requires some understanding of how the universe itself works. Kenneth Boulding, an economist and pioneer of complex systems, pointed out in the 1960s that the earth can be thought of as a spaceship: The material available for economic activity is limited to what is already on board the craft floating in the universe. The fact that the earth is a system closed to matter has important implications. For all practical purposes, nothing ever enters or leaves. But the earth is open to energy. It receives a continuous flow of energy from outside the system in the form of sunlight, and it radiates roughly the same amount of heat back into space. This flow of heat from the sun is a key factor in making life on the earth not only possible, but abundant. The energy from past sunlight is stored in coal, oil, and natural gas. These are called stocks. Present and future sunlight is called flows.⁷ Both stocks and flows of sunlight are finite, and this inescapable fact places limits on the earth's life-support capacity. Understanding this fact forms an essential foundation for building an economy in right relationship with life and our earth.¹²

What Is Wealth?

Everything on the earth gives us our wealth. We typically treat wealth as solely a matter of money. In fact, money is a human tool exchanged for the real things that make up wealth: edible plants and animals, useful objects such as containers or furniture, the land and soil that can continue to produce real wealth in the future. Valuing the symbolic value (money) higher than the real one has led to the wholesale neglect of what makes this wealth possible. The fundamental wealth on the earth is the ability to maintain life itself. The fundamental wealth on the earth, on which all else depends, is the ability to maintain life itself, which is made possible by the ability of green plants to convert sunlight into sugars. Plant-based sugars are wealth. They are used by the plants themselves and by virtually all other organisms to sustain themselves and to reproduce. Without this simple activity, all the manufactured capital, all the human capital, all the social capital, all the money, all the bank deposits, and all the credit cards on the earth—the totality of these not only would be worthless, they would not exist. An economy in right relationship with real wealth is built on the simple fact that the integrity, resilience, and beauty of natural and social communities depends on the earth's vibrant but finite life-support capacity.

What Is Waste?

Like symbolic wealth, waste does

not exist in nature. All materials—from cow dung to lava flows—are reused or recycled for a huge variety of purposes. On the surface of the planet, nature's "wastes" support all life. Within conventional economics, the undesired products of an economic activity are viewed as useless "waste." If they are not priced, they are viewed as external to the market. This is what is called the "theory of externalities." The basic idea is that the prices paid in a transaction often do not include all the costs of production. For example, without some kind of correction, the \$50 paid for a tire will not reflect the damage done to the lungs and laundry of people who live downwind of the plant where the tire is made. Because this unintended by-product is considered "external" to the market, it is a cost that the tire manufacturer and the consumer never pay, in an unregulated market.¹³ Making the tire manufacturer pay for the pollution and harm it causes is an example of the "polluter pays" principle, which is extremely appealing at first glance. If you are going to cause harms, then you should pay for them. Even so, the polluter-pays principle is not an adequate solution to the pollution, toxic substance, and "waste" stream problem. First, it is often impossible to calculate the monetary costs of pollution. How much harm will any given amount of additional carbon dioxide in the atmosphere—which speeds up global warming—cause by changing monsoon patterns in India over the next century? Second, while the polluter-pays principle, in theory, allows a business or institution to pollute as much as it wishes as long as it is willing to pay for the pollution, there are some things that should be prohibited, rather than tolerated as long as compensation is paid. No amount of compensation will make up for a child killed or deformed by toxic chemicals in her playground. Third, the polluter-pays principle is almost always applied in an anthropocentric way, assuming that only costs to humans matter. A deformed and dying frog population is regarded as irrelevant unless people are also affected. The theory of externalities also fails to consider that, strictly speaking, there is no such thing as a "by-product." All results of manufacturing and processing industries are direct products, whether they are useful or not.⁸ In a whole earth economy there is no such place as "away," as in "throw it away." All worn-out or castoff products remain within the ecosystem. All economic activity is internal to the biosphere.¹⁴ To fashion an economy existing in right relationship with life's commonwealth, a big jump is needed to an entirely different conceptual framework and accounting system. Only an economy that completely outgrows the idea of "waste" can work on spaceship earth, where all products of manufacturing and other processes must be accounted for. In a whole earth economy, materials internalization would replace cost internalization: Manufacturers would be responsible for recycling as much energy and material as possible. Similarly, the notion of consumption, which implies an ending or discarding of the material consumed, must give way to a notion of transformation of the material into the beginning of something else. This is what is called the "waste is food" or "cradle to cradle" approach.⁹ In a whole earth economy, refusal to tolerate any waste has to become the goal for all economic activity. The European Union is taking important steps in this direction. Today every car or washing machine coming off the assembly line in the EU must be recyclable. All the components must either be recycled by the earth (if benign) or reused in the industrial stream (if

poisonous), thereby using the nonabsorbable heavy metals and petrochemicals again to make more machines. Legislation to this effect has been in effect for years in Germany, for example, though it still seems light-years away to North Americans. Of course, during the operation of an appliance like a washing machine, soap, bleach, and other by-products will be used and discarded—which also must be processed by the earth's systems.¹⁵ Question #3: How big is too big? How does the earth's finiteness affect how we think about the economy? Pondering this focuses attention on the issue of whether the economy could be too big, too fast, or too intense. The current economy has no measure of "enough." It has no means of saying when growth has become what economist Herman Daly has termed "uneconomic"—when the negative effects of growth outweigh the benefits.¹⁰ An economy in right relationship with the planet has a thermostat, complete with a shutoff valve, that prevents economic growth from shutting down the very life-support systems on which the economy depends. Understanding the question of scale starts with the fact that plants are the basic energy source from which all animals (including humans and their cultural projects) ultimately come. Plants get their energy from sunlight. The global growth economy is overly dependent on consuming sunlight from the past that is stored in fossil fuels. It shifts many of the ecological consequences of current economic activity to the future, building up carbon dioxide in the atmosphere and taking heavy metals from under the earth's surface and scattering them throughout the surface environment. We humans can do the math; we know that renewable resources such as soil, forests, and fish are now being consumed at a rate faster than they can be replenished, and we know that greenhouse gases are increasing dangerously in the atmosphere. Most of us recognize that this simply does not work over the long term. An economy without a thermostat or shutoff valve—for example, having no way to make drastic cuts in greenhouse gas emissions despite an overwhelming scientific consensus that indicates not doing so will lead to catastrophic climate change—is in wrong relationship with the commonwealth of life. This means that we are still not effectively answering a simple question: How big should the economy be? The economy's growth and size, as well as its intensity, velocity, and momentum, must be judged at every turn by its impact on the "integrity, resilience, and beauty" of human society and ecological communities. The momentum of the economy is especially important to keep in mind. For example, because so many impacts of human economic activity are growing on such a massive scale, even if greenhouse gas emissions were to start decreasing immediately, and even if emissions were to equal nature's withdrawals, it would still take decades, even centuries, for the climate to stabilize.¹⁶ Measuring the scale of the economy and its impacts on social and ecological communities will require rigorous scientific inquiry and monitoring of indicators of both ecosystem and social-system health and resilience, on a global scale. In today's economy, scientific research tends to favor profit-making pursuits. Tracking the scale of the economy will take a much greater commitment to scientific research aimed at the common good—at developing a comprehensive understanding of how key life-support systems function. New measures of societal and ecological well-being, many of which already have been proposed, will need to be refined and

then substituted for cu --This text refers to an alternate kindle_edition edition.From the PublisherPraise for Right Relationship"We truly need to reinvent our man-made world if we hope to sustain flourishing human and natural communities. Starting from first principles, this wonderful book provides a much-needed, innovative blueprint for this rebuilding."--Gus Speth, Dean, School of Forestry and Environmental Studies, Yale University; cofounder of the Natural Resources Defense Council; and author of *The Bridge at the Edge of the World*"Right Relationship provides a compelling account of the inclusive ethical framework required to address the interrelated environmental, economic and social challenges of the 21st century. Its proposals for economic reform and global governance describe clearly the kind of radical change needed to secure a promising future for the human family and larger community of life on earth."--Steven Rockefeller, Co-chair, Earth Charter International Council"This remarkable book asks appropriate and fundamental questions about the kind of world in which we want to live and proposes an ethical and systemic approach to designing the future."--Elizabeth Dowdeswell, former Executive Director, United Nations Environment Programme, and founder and former CEO, Nuclear Waste Management Organization, Canada--This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.From the Back CoverA Bold New Vision for a Just and Flourishing EarthOur current economic system--which assumes endless growth and limitless potential wealth--flies in the face of the fact that the earth's life support capacity is finite. The result is increasing destruction of the natural world and growing, sometimes lethal, tension between rich and poor.Peter G. Brown and Geoffrey Garver use the core Quaker principle of "right relationship"--respecting the integrity, resilience, and beauty of human and natural communities--as the foundation for a new economic model. Right Relationship poses five basic questions: What is an economy for? How does it work? How big is too big? What's fair? And how can it best be governed? Brown and Garver expose the antiquated, shortsighted, and downright dangerous assumptions that underlie our current answers to these questions, as well as the shortcomings of many reform efforts. They propose new answers that combine an acute awareness of ecological limits with a fundamental focus on fairness and a concern with the spiritual, as well as material, well-being of the human race. And they outline what each of us can do to enable life's commonwealth.--This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.About the AuthorPeter G. Brown holds academic appointments at McGill in the Departments of Geography, and Natural Resource Sciences, as well as the School of Environment. Brown is also the author of *Restoring the Public Trust: A Fresh Vision for Progressive Government in America* (Beacon Press, 1994), and *Ethics, Economics, and International Relations: Transparent Sovereignty in the Commonwealth of Life* (Edinburgh University Press, 2000); this was re-published in Canada by Blackrose Press (2001) under the title *The Commonwealth of Life: A Treatise on Stewardship Economics*. Geoff Garver is an environmental consultant and lecturer in law in Montreal, Quebec. From 2000 to 2007, he was a senior official at the North American Commission for Environmental Cooperation, directing the unit that publishes detailed factual investigations of complaints by North American citizens that one of the NAFTA countries --

Mexico, the United States and Canada -- is failing to effectively enforce its environmental law. Previously, he spent nine years with the U.S. Justice Department's Environment and Natural Resources Division as a trial attorney and then an Acting Assistant Chief handling cases dealing with land and natural resource management, water rights and environmental impact assessment. Some of his major cases concerned Everglades water quality, winter use and bison management in Yellowstone National Park and water rights in Idaho and Oregon. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title. Read more

[*Download to continue reading...*](#)

What people say about this book

R. Riley, "Wonderful Integration of Social Justice and Ecological Harmony as Goals for a Viable Economic System. This book by Peter G. Brown et al came out of a Quaker working group focusing on attaining social justice and ecological sustainability in our U.S. economic system. It is succinct and very readable and understandable. It challenges some of the "assumptions" found in our present economic-political system. The authors rightly point to the core VALUES and GOALS which must serve as the foundation of a truly healthy economic-political system, pointing out the many shortcomings found in our existing system. They demonize no one, but are very insightful in pointing out the social and ecological damage our existing system has been doing. This book was one of the very first I read as our church formed a new "Economic Reform Advocacy Group," and it helped provide some of the foundation of my own thinking in this area. I can't recommend it enough as a foundational work for study and advocacy of economic reform."

Michael, "Dream On. This is an interesting, save-the-Earth book. If you are an idealist, you will love it. The plans it outlines are clear, logical and compassionate. However, if you are a realist, you will soon see that one would have to be hopelessly optimistic and naive to think any plans like the ones proposed will ever be carried out by human beings. Either way, it is a good read."

AutreVie, "Change your worldview!. This is a clearly and earnestly written book that aims to change your world view. The subject is so obvious - that the earth cannot support unlimited growth and expanding economies forever - that I wonder why there haven't been a plethora of books on the subject. The authors extol us to think thoughtfully and carefully about our actions and their affects on everything around us, living in "right relationship" with the earth, respecting others and the environment."

Barb, "Very pleased, everyone should read this. I am in the midst of reading this book. I have known about it for some time and heard one of the authors at a conference discussing this book. I encourage anyone interested in the future for ourselves, our children and the health of the planet we are a part of to read it. Good work to all involved."

Faith, "Morally intelligent, hopeful. Thorough treatment of a crisis that remains shockingly ignored. The content is accessible to the general reader. Extremely important reading for all."

L.A. Little, "A broadening of Economics. Philosophical enquiry almost always starts with a definition of the field being inquired about, and Right Relationship - Building a Whole Earth Economy, by Peter G. Brown and Geoffrey Garver, is no different. Brown and Garver tell us that the field of economics is too narrowly defined to serve a useful purpose for the inhabitants of the spaceship Earth. In fact, they set about to show that the marriage of economics with ecology is

more sensible and is necessary if economics is to provide a guiding hand in the betterment for earth's inhabitants. Note that these inhabitants are not just people, but animal and plant life as well. *Right Relationship* starts out by questioning the basic assumption that the earth's environment is a subset of the human economy, and that the earth belongs to humans. It concludes that this assumption is tragically at odds with reality and that in fact, human culture and its economic goals are instead just a subset of the earth's environment and resources. We are not masters of the Universe as we like to think of ourselves. The authors provide a sweeping view of how the marriage of economics and ecology necessarily change the way we view things. Without taking this more holistic view, our species is pushing fast towards a social calamity that threatens not only our way of life, but our entire existence. It offers ample evidence of how our abuses of the earth's resources are relentlessly changing the environment in which we live, and that those changes threaten our survival. A new economic model is offered where population, affluence, technology, and ethics are both the driving and the limiting factors for this revised reality. *Right Relationship* isn't a Utopian book as much as a call to action - a desire to awaken the world populace in an effort to stave off impending doom. It offers several concrete ways to implement these changes and addresses the need to temper individualism, national sovereignty, and establish a world order. Clearly, for most people, these ideas are not popular. In fact, that probably is the most difficult part of the book to grasp - the idea of some form of Global Federation creating and enforcing behavior where all communal interests are accounted for. Implicit is the need for a huge redistribution of wealth and power; an idea not easily adoptable. They will necessarily be fought tooth and nail by those with power and money. In summation, Brown and Garver have tackled a subject of pressing international interest and have done so with an honest appraisal of where they believe we currently are and what it will take to get from here to there. They offer some detail in what it would take to improve the plight of the world, but the scope of what they suggest implies enormous change. Those details are sure to find significant opposition by those whose power is threatened, and they are numerous. Regardless, Brown and Garver both expect and welcome the dialogue. This book is a refreshing read for a troubled world. Reviewed on 10/04/09 by L.A. Little for [...]"

Rolf Dobelli, "Economic look at environmental issues. Many books decry human greed, describe the degradation of the environment and end with a few short pages recommending reform. This isn't that type of book. Instead, from the first page, Canadian environmentalists Peter G. Brown and Geoffrey Garver agitate for a revolution in the way people use natural resources. They present an admirably solid case that the relationship between the Earth and the global economy must change, and soon. Whether their idealistic prescription (global governance institutions?) is realistic, however, remains to be seen. getAbstract recommends this book to leaders who seek a fresh perspective on sustainability and the economy."

[DMCA](#)