

Care Economy
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My thanks to M. Six Silberman for foundational conversations and encouragement..

Xean, a functional alcoholic, lives in Akron Ohio in the year 2173; he makes his living caring for the stray cats and mallard ducks in his neighborhood and tending a neighborhood park (removing invasive species, clearing clogged drains in the fountain, picking up trash, etc) daily. Michaela visits him each week on rounds just as she visits all of those who struggle with addiction in this and two bordering neighborhoods. Michaela always brings Mo, a hairless xoloitzcuintli therapy dog-- as sweet tempered as it is ugly-- who sidles up to her charges for petting while Michaela carries out her physical and socio-emotional examinations.

On August 22nd 2082 the Shanghai Composite Index fell so hard and deep that it set off a massive domino effect. The global economy could not recover as it had in the wake of each of the minor sags that had plagued global markets in the preceding years. This is when the ground shifted. The U.N. held a council of the leaders of nations around the world. All were affected by the crash. 93% sent delegates to the Dhaka Meetings. Adama Joyce (Kenya), acting president, began with broad strokes. Let's do what thoughtful minds have urged for over a century now. We must abolish GDP as the measure on which our global economy runs. But what do we put in its place? Among the core of economics experts who testified at the request of President Joyce were social scientists and humanities scholars: people versed in anthropology, sociology, psychology, social ecology, public health, and cultural studies. What is resilience? What is a resilient economy? What is a good life? Suddenly the field of economics was well and truly opened wide to these questions. The delegates listened rapt, thinking of the chaos back home, as presenters lectured on topics such as jua kali, Totnesian governance, Anabaptist philosophy, failures and successes of ancient and contemporary economic systems, and theories of human development. Eventually a plan was made, to which all countries signed in a great accord. It hinged on basic income, paid through income taxes, property taxes, inheritance taxes, and luxury taxes generated by the manufacture and sale of new non-essential goods. The plan, administered at the level of the nation-state, also allowed for an expanded role for informal economies for goods and services. To allow this, countries who had not done so yet liberalized social services and made them widely available; even the strongly religious countries agreed to work to end stigmas against birth control and abortion and make these services widely available.

Perhaps the most prominent feature of the plan were the care work bonuses. People who engaged in any of a widely defined and intricately classified range of care-work, repair-work, and management activities focused around humans, flora, fauna, ecologies, objects, and infrastructures received commensurate bonuses in their monthly basic income checks. For this reason, the new system came to be known as the Care Economy.

Under the care economy, perceptions have shifted. Perhaps this is exemplified by the development and wide popularity of a new religious tradition, known as Gamishan. Gamishan is hard to describe. It borrows the ideals of service and personal responsibility from Christianity and marries them to Buddhist ideology about freedom from suffering and aesthetics of austerity, somehow blending seamlessly with many folk religious traditions that focus on earth and harvest, celebration and even, at times, complete and total excess. Of course Gamishan takes on local form wherever it goes, but one tradition that seems to hold in gatherings across the world is the *sombremesa* in which a meal is cooked and eaten together after which elders tell stories to the rest, at whatever pace they wish. Of course children wander off to play but what else could you expect? In this world, we care for what we can care for, and try less hard to control what cannot be controlled.