Indeed, as an innovative route to economic transformation, the success of micro initiatives represents the aggressive use of market forces and sustainable business practices to achieve substantive social goals. Both the Bangladeshi flagship NGOs – BRAC and Grameen (born in 1972 and 1976 respectively) – are classic examples of such a model. Also, originated in Kenya in 1999, Jamii Bora is a more recent addition. To add to Brac and Grameen's outstanding success in lifting millions of rural people (women) out of poverty, a community development action (initiated in 2010) called 'London Creative Labs' progresses the challenge of fighting poverty in a developed Western city.

Having mastered how to scale up community-owned solutions to reach across the whole of rural Bangladesh, Brac started 'value chain' transformations and redesigned the total supply and production chain of poultry around different jobs villagers could do to generate income that took whole communities out of poverty. Brac has also innovated similar interventions so that the dairy chain is owned bottom-up. It has also used crop science to start to transform many agricultural value chains both in Bangladesh and in countries where partnerships invite Brac to implement its grassroots networks abroad.

Remarkably, the recent successes of Grameen-type collateral-free microcredit, Brac-type microfinance initiatives devoted to the ultra-poor in rural areas and Jamii Bora's microfinance in urban slums challenge policymakers, donors and global financiers to review and assess *how poor households save, invest and build assets*. While successes of micro initiatives continue, overindebtedness from multiple loans, coercive collection practices, exorbitant interest rates and mission drift arising out of two MFIs – Compartamos in Mexico and SKS in India, hugely profiting from Initial Public Offerings (IPOs) – appear as grey areas. These pose a challenge to the sector's direction. Obviously, reasserting the integrity of the MFI sector not to lose sight of its development focus is deemed essential.

The role of the Journal will be one of providing a forum for a wide range of discussions of the problems and experiences of social cause-driven entrepreneurial activities. The JSB welcomes contributions that address society's most pressing problems in new and imaginative ways. Finally, even in a small way, the consistent appearance of quarterly JSB issues in 2012 may help in that process in order to maximise social impact, thus enhancing human welfare.

JSB Editorial Team
April, 2012

The Multi-Faith Ethic and the Spirit of Social Business: Notes from an Ethnography

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Abstract: This paper is structured around an analogy with Max Weber's famous book *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, and argues that there are 'elective affinities' – to use Weber's term – between the multi-faith ethic and the spirit of social business. It begins with a discussion of these concepts, and also draws on ethnographic data from a study of the Blood Foundation, a small multi-faith NGO based in Fang, northern Thailand, which has a social business ethos. Networking and cooperation are crucial to the work of social businesses and NGOs, so this paper includes discussion of NGO cooperation within the Fang Valley Development Network. It concludes with a discussion of the specific elective affinities that can be identified.

Keywords: social business, social economy, religion, multi-faith activity, NGO cooperation.

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1. Introduction

The concept of social business, as distinct from social enterprise, social entrepreneurship, and other phenomena within the social economy, is most easily conceptualised as sitting within the tradition of analysis and practice that is associated with Muhammad Yunus. In *Building Social Business*, Yunus (2010: 3-12) distinguishes social business quite sharply from those other phenomena, but here I want to observe that they also have much in common. Accordingly, I use the concept of the *spirit* of social business to capture the ethic that is proper to social business, and also associated to a greater or lesser degree with those other phenomena within the social economy. I have indicated that those other phenomena include social enterprise and social entrepreneurship; they also include cooperatives, corporate social responsibility, social franchising, and some aspects of donor-based charity and philanthropy.

For anyone with the most elementary knowledge of sociology, the title of this paper clearly echoes Max Weber's (1958) foundational work *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, which argued that there was an ethic proper to early capitalism – which Weber (1958: 47ff) termed the spirit of capitalism – and that this ethic possessed certain 'elective affinities' with the ethic that evolved from Martin Luther's thought, over the course of the Protestant Reformation, and into the teachings of John Wesley. In this paper, then, I argue that there are 'elective affinities' between the spirit of social business and the ethic of multi-faith – that is multi-religious – dialogue and activity. This is an ethic that has evolved from the Chicago Parliament of the World's Religions in 1893 and into the period of post-World War II labour migration and post-Cold War globalisation, and it has consequences for our understanding of religion, as well as for ethical living in today's world.

This paper begins with a discussion of the spirit of social business, followed by a discussion of the multi-faith ethic. Then I draw on some ethnographic data from a study of the Blood Foundation, a small NGO based in northern Thailand which combines a commitment to religious pluralism and to the spirit of social business in its work among refugees and other communities on the Thai-Burma border. Networking and cooperation are as crucial to the work of social businesses and NGOs as competition is to other businesses, so this paper also includes discussion of cooperation between NGOs, including the Blood Foundation, as a further manifestation of the 'elective affinities' between the multi-faith

ethic and the spirit of social business. The paper concludes with a discussion of those 'elective affinities': the specific meaning of the term, and the specific elective affinities that can be identified.

Social networks are often studied using a method known as social network analysis, which tends towards the quantitative. However, John Scott (2000: 4-5) points to its origins in anthropology, and the research on which this paper uses a methodology that owes more to those origins than to the current state of the art in social network analysis. Much of this research has been ethnographic, that is, it uses participant observation, which is of course a method that is strongly qualitative. Ethnography is often understood as pre-theoretical, that is, it is argued that theories should be built from ethnographic data, that they should be *a posteriori* and not *a priori*. This position has been influential in anthropology, which is the discipline most closely associated with ethnography. However, ethnography is also a tool of sociology, which, as a discipline, tends to insist on the prior nature of theory, that it is theory that tells us what is worth observing and what questions we should ask. The ethnographic sociologist is reflexive and goes into the field with questions in mind, which may include questions about one's own assumptions and whether they are likely to be correct or not. So while anthropology is something that I happily draw on, it is not my discipline in the sense of constraining my research. The participant observation was carried out in Fang, northern Thailand, in the second half of 2011.

2. The Spirit of Social Business

Max Weber (1958: 47ff) loosely defined the spirit of capitalism in terms of Benjamin Franklin's dictum that 'time is money', and Franklin's conviction that to waste time was a form of imprudence, equivalent to throwing one's money into the sea. Weber argued that this was neither greed nor 'mere business astuteness', but an ethic, an ethos, an end in itself, 'an ethically coloured maxim for the conduct of life' (Weber 1958: 51-2), the culmination of which was 'the earning of more and more money, combined with the strict avoidance of all spontaneous enjoyment' (Weber 1958: 53).

Yunus's seven principles of social business loosely define the spirit of social business. They are 'key characteristics', 'the core of social business', 'a touchstone and a constant reminder of the values that are

at the heart of the social business idea' (Yunus2010: 2-3). Readers of this journal will, no doubt, be familiar with these principles, but I doubt if anyone will mind reading them again:

> 1. The business objective is to overcome poverty, or one or more problems (such as education, health, technology access, and environment) that threaten people and society – not to maximise profit.
>
> 2. The company will attain financial and economic sustainability.
>
> 3. Investors get back only their investment amount. No dividend is given beyond the return of the original investment.
>
> 4. When the investment amount is paid back, profit stays with the company for expansion and improvement.
>
> 5. The company will be environmentally conscious.
>
> 6. The workforce gets market wage with better-than-standard working conditions.
>
> 7. Do it with joy!!! (Yunus 2010: 3)

When I say that Weber and Yunus *loosely* define capitalism and social business respectively, I mean that these definitions do not follow the strict principle of *genus proximum, differentia specifica*, to use Weber's words (1958: 47). It is no criticism of Yunus to say that we could not realistically use his seven principles as a checklist to determine whether an entity is a social business or not. Even the most simplistic consideration of this is adequate to demonstrate the point. Would an entity need to score seven out of seven to be a social business? Or would six out of seven be sufficient? If we allocate ten points to each principle, would they need to score at least five out of ten on all seven? Or would an overall 35 out of 70 count as a pass mark? If I do have a criticism of Yunus, it is that, in responding to misconceptions and misuses of social business, he sometimes gets bogged down in the details, making rigid distinctions between social business and social entrepreneurship, social enterprise, cooperatives and so on (e.g. Yunus 2010: 3ff), which are more like different dialects of the same language than different languages. But Yunus's seven principles reflect the *spirit* of social business (and social enterprise, and other entities within the social economy or third sector), and do not necessarily have to be interpreted as criteria for defining social business.

What Yunus's seven principles point to is an ethos of using the tools of capitalism to solve the human and environmental problems that have been created and exacerbated most damagingly by capitalism, and also

by earlier modes of production. It is capitalism with a triple bottom line – people, planet, profit – with the important proviso that profit itself is a tool, not an end in itself. The search for profit that is the defining characteristic of capitalism is not the driving force of social business. Social business (at least Type 1 social business) can rather be described as involving business-like management of resources to achieve a social objective. Yunus rightly points out that 'a *complete* break from the for-profit attitude' is a *sine qua non* of social business (2010: 16, added emphasis); this statement captures the spirit of social business by being uncompromising, but not pedantic. The ethos that Yunus's seven principles point to is also the spirit of social enterprise, the cooperative movement, social entrepreneurship, social franchising, and, to a lesser extent, corporate social responsibility and some aspects of donor-based charity. Yunus (2010: 8) states that a cooperative can be a social business when it is owned by poor people, but ownership by the poor has always been an intrinsic feature of the cooperative movement, as facilitated by Robert Owen in industrial-revolution New Lanark and by the Fair Trade movement in developing countries today. Grameen Bank has itself been a cooperative as much as it has been a social business.

Social business, social enterprise, social entrepreneurship, cooperatives, and other entities within the wider social economy have an important feature in common: they have common roots in civil society. Civil society is frequently defined as a 'third sector' of society, after the market and the state, but it is less than satisfactory to define it in terms of what it is *not*. I will return to this theme later, but here I note that civil society is defined by Michael Waltzer (1995: 7) as 'the space of uncoerced human association and also the set of relational networks – formed for the sake of family, faith, interest and ideology – that fill this space'. A strict interpretation of this definition would seem to exclude social business, which, while not motivated by *profit*, is often formed primarily for the sake of *economic* transformation rather than relational networks.

However, Yunus points out that it is these relational networks that have allowed social business and microcredit to exist. Not only do social norms and cooperative ownership ensure a high repayment rate on microloans, but the development of civil society has also gone hand in hand with the economic empowerment of the poor:

> In the early years of Grameen Bank, strong cultural norms in Bangladesh made it hard for us to attract female borrowers. . . Over time, we solved these problems by creating a new, alternative culture for village ladies. We taught thousands to read and write, starting with their names – an incredibly empowering experience for them.

> Thousands more discovered the power of a shared community with other Grameen borrowers who supported one another. They learned to enjoy coming to the Grameen bank centres for weekly meetings at which they would sing songs, engage in simple exercises, and share stories about their families and the small businesses they had created. (Yunus 2010: 65-6).

The concept of civil society was developed by the Scottish Enlightenment thinker Adam Ferguson – a contemporary and, in many ways, opponent of Adam Smith, whose work is compared to Yunus's in the inaugural issue of this journal (Skinner 2011, Donaldson et al 2011). In *An Essay on the History of Civil Society*, published in 1767, civil society and the state are not separated; rather, civil society is a precondition for the existence of the state. Civil society for Ferguson is synonymous with active citizenship and political participation, in the Aristotelian sense of inculcating virtue: 'It is in conducting the affairs of civil society, that mankind find the exercise of their best talents, as well as the object of their best affections' (Ferguson 1995: 149). Furthermore, civil society is in many ways the state of nature, not a later evolutionary development of humankind:

> Mankind are to be taken in groupes [sic], as they have always subsisted. The history of the individual is but a detail of the sentiments and thoughts he has entertained in the view of his species: and every experiment relative to this subject should be made with entire societies, not with single men (Ferguson 1995: 10).

Here, we see a foreshadowing of the sociological dictum that society precedes the individual, as well as an assertion that Waltzer's 'space of uncoerced human association' and 'set of relational networks' have always existed as part of the essence of humankind. Ferguson continues:

> We have every reason, however, to believe, that in the case of such an experiment made, we shall suppose, with a colony of children transplanted from the nursery, and left to form a society apart, untaught, and undisciplined, we should only have the same things repeated, which, in so many different parts of the earth, have been transacted already. The members of our little society would feed and sleep, would herd together and play, would have a language of their own, would quarrel and divide, would be to one another the most important objects of the scene, and, in the ardour of their friendships and competitions, would overlook their personal danger, and suspend the care of their self-preservation. Has not the human race been planted like the colony in question? (Ferguson 1995: 10)

In her introduction to Ferguson's *Essay*, Fania Oz-Salzberger summarises his argument as follows:

> It is difficult to see the moment in time when Ferguson claims that society became 'civil'. In the most important sense, it always was. . . The foundations of civil society. . . are communal bonds and public virtue, which are older than property. Ferguson would not subscribe to Rousseau's famous dictum, in his *Discourssur l'inégalité* (1755), that the first appropriator of land was 'the real founder of civil society' (Oz-Salzberger 1995: xviii).

In other words, it would be better to regard civil society – including the social economy – as the 'first sector' rather than the third. The state and the economy are the 'superstructure' (to use a word that Marx borrowed from Ferguson) of civil society. They are the sphere of competition for power and economic capital. The social economy – social business, social enterprise, social entrepreneurship, cooperatives, etc – is part of the infrastructure. It is the sphere of cooperation, not competition, leading to the accumulation of social capital.

This point is made by Mark Munoz in his book on international social entrepreneurship: social entrepreneurs and social enterprises need to build relationships, form alliances and partnerships (especially at a local level), and collaborate with others (Munoz 2010: 48-9, 70-1, 86). This is partly because social enterprises and social businesses have a mission to change society, and this mission is compromised if they keep the secrets of their success to themselves. It is also because cooperation sometimes makes good business sense. An important area of the social economy is that of social franchising, and in this area networks are of fundamental importance, because the success of any franchise operation – social or otherwise – is largely down to its ability to plug franchisees into a network of intellectual property and sociability (see Munoz 2010: 85, Franchising 2010: 34-9). In this area, there is a congruence of ends and means: it makes good business sense to cooperate with those who might otherwise be regarded as competitors, and cooperation is crucial to the mission of a social business.

3. The Multi-Faith Ethic

One of the leading multi-faith scholars, Paul Knitter (1998), argues that 'in order to know whether 'God' and 'Sunyata' might, after all, have something in common, we must not only pray and meditate together, but we must first act together with and for the oppressed'. Although this statement might appear to have a pious ring to it, it also has a secular

social-scientific relevance. The word 'God' is probably familiar to most people reading this journal, even if there is little agreement about what the word refers to. The word 'God' refers variously to the supreme being, the creator, and, more subtly, to the ground of being, that is, to existence itself rather than a being who exists. *Sunyata* is a Mahayana Buddhist concept usually translated as 'emptiness'. Apophatic theology and some strands of Christian mysticism talk about the God they believe in as 'void' or 'nothing', so, on a theological level, it is possible to find common ground between the two concepts. Buddhism is a dharmic religion – referring to a natural law underpinning the universe, rather than a creation or personal creator – but the languages of some Buddhist peoples, for example Burmese, translate the New Testament Greek word– *logos* as *dharma* (Sanskrit) or *dhamma* (Pali). Hence, the Gospel of Saint John in Burmese begins by stating that in the beginning was the *dhamma*, and the *dhamma* was with God, and the *dhamma* was God. Again, at the level of abstract theology, there is more in common between theistic and dharmic religions than meets the eye, even at the point where they seem to diverge most strongly.

In the context within which Knitter is writing, the words 'pray' and 'meditate' are respectively Christian and Buddhist, although they are of course central practices in many religions. So Knitter is also posing a question about whether or not prayer and meditation have more in common than we often assume. 'Prayer' is usually taken to assume communication with something or someone external (God, for example), while 'meditation' denotes something more internal, but it's not really that simple. Some believers and practitioners of theistic religions are uncomfortable with the close linguistic association between 'prayer' and 'petition', and would rather use the term 'meditation' to connote that it is something deeper than approaching God with a 'shopping list' of requests.

However, the central claim is that acting with and for the oppressed is at least as relevant as abstract theological dialogue to questions of whether or not theistic and dharmic religions such as Christianity and Buddhism have more in common than is frequently supposed. This claim has been made by other people; for example, the Dalai Lama makes this point whenever he participates in inter-faith activity, as a result of a comment made to him by Archbishop Desmond Tutu.

Inter-religious and multi-faith activity is informed by conceptualisations of religion. These conceptualisations are not always explicit or well-defined – in contrast to the unending debate within the sociology

and phenomenology of religion regarding definitions of religion – but, rather, are used to decide who is entitled to participate by virtue of being a *bona fide* religion, and who is not. Multi-faith activity can sometimes be fairly characterised as a pooling of religious resources to fight political battles, on abortion and religious education, for example, or on Fair Trade and cancelling Third World Debt. However, the activity is based on an assumption that there is a spiritual richness in the more prominent of the world's religions, and that this diffusion of spiritual richness is obscured by fundamentalism. Hence, fundamentalists are largely excluded from inter-faith activity, though such exclusion is usually unnecessary since they shun the very activity from which they are excluded. This exclusion is underlined by terminology that is commonly heard in inter-faith forums, such as 'mainline churches'. Consequently, the roles of self and other are largely reallocated, and the question of who is entitled to participate and who is not becomes less obvious.

Some years ago, I observed that inter-faith activity takes place within a context of church-state relations and a hermeneutic circle (Brown 2002; see also Brown 2006: 9). The UK and French experience of Muslim-Christian dialogue suggests that dialogue is a stimulus to social action – working with and for the oppressed – in the context of institutionally weak church-state relations, but less so when those relations are stronger. The hermeneutic circle implies an ongoing attempt to understand intellectually and practically the theological basis for dialogue based on a 'fresh' reading of the religious tradition, a reading that is consciously done within a social context which is the world as it is experienced by the oppressed. This is also an insight of Liberation Theology, as it has been developed in South America.

In the same article, I cited the four principles of a Muslim-Christian group in the north of France, the *GroupeIslamo-Chrétien du Hautmont-Mouvaux*, which are: friendship, convergence between the two cultures and religions, respect for doctrinal differences, and a mutual spiritual stimulation (Brown 2010: 12). The multi-faith ethic does not imply that we should create a single world religion by putting the extant faiths into some sort of 'melting pot', but nor does it imply that we should leave them in the current 'salad bowl' and accept their *assumed* differences as *real* differences.

One of the most common mistakes that is made – in the West at least – in defining religion is to focus excessively on *beliefs*, that is, propositional statements that outline a theological worldview. Christianity is unusual among the world religions in the central role that is given to

belief, and it is probably because of this that Westerners have historically tended to define other religions in terms of their beliefs. But belief is not necessarily central to defining religion *per se*. Sociological and phenomenological definitions of religion that are focused on *practice* are more productive. Working backwards from Karen Armstrong (e.g. 2006, 2009), the focus on practice is part of an attempt to uncover what religions have in common, or, in phenomenological jargon, to describe the essence of the religious phenomenon. In a recent article (Brown 2010), I put it this way:

> When I say that religion is non-propositional, I mean that religion will often enact certain rituals, or tell certain stories, or posit faith in someone, and that propositional statements of doctrine are merely reflections or approximations of this non-propositional core. Faith in God is not a proposition. The Eucharist is not a proposition. Prayer is not, at its core, a proposition. Pilgrimage is not a proposition. And it is these sorts of things that, I suggest, form the core of religion. Propositions are what happen when theologians and academics get their hands on religion, they try to intellectualise it so that it can be made to fit within their area of expertise – our area of expertise. But, that is not where it belongs. Propositions about rituals impose a certainty on them, whereas the ritual itself allows for courage in the face of doubt.

Although I am discussing the multi-faith *ethic*, I reject the notion that religion can be defined or conceptualised ethically, that the core of religion is an ethical one. In the same article (Brown 2010), I argue this point as follows:

> . . . religion has an aesthetic and an ethical dimension, and in some religions these dimensions are particularly important, but that does not make them central to religion as such. Kierkegaard regarded the religious sphere as radically different from the aesthetic or even the ethical, hence his treatment of the story of Abraham going to Mount Moriah to sacrifice his son, in obedience to God's command. His son was not killed in the end, but Abraham was ready to do the deed. This is not ethical. This is fundamentally and scandalously unethical. Yet it is religious, not because it is unethical and scandalous, but because it pushes us to the limits of our understanding, through the waters of doubt, and then beyond.

That said, I am forced to recognise that an ethical understanding of religion is important to the way that multi-faith activity is *perceived* from the *inside*. Karen Armstrong's 'Charter for Compassion' states that: 'The principle of compassion lies at the heart of all religious, ethical and spiritual traditions, calling us always to treat all others as we wish to be treated ourselves.'[2] Not only do the practical, ethical concerns of many religions match with the social concerns of social business, but the meta-ethical principle of the 'Golden Rule' is elevated from something that is taught *within* many religions to a definitive principle of religion *per se*. My point here is not to criticise that elevation, but to recognise it. Similarly, Hans Küng's project for a global ethic is premised on the affirmation 'that a common set of core values is found in the teachings of the religions, and that these form the basis of a global ethic', such an ethic being 'a fundamental consensus on binding values, irrevocable standards, and personal attitudes'.[3] The basis for a global ethic, according to Küng, exists in the world religions and is enhanced by dialogue between them. This dialogue towards a global ethic is necessary if peace among the religions is to become a reality, and this in turn is asserted to be a necessary condition of peace between the nations.

There is much in these statements that is to be welcomed. Neither the Charter for Compassion nor the Global Ethic have become the basis for a formulation of self and other that is used to decide who is a legitimate participant in inter-faith dialogue and who is not. The danger is there, but the importance of working with and for the oppressed is undiminished. Eventually, we need to leave theological dialogue to one side and enter the world of the poor, the refugees, the excluded ethnic minorities, and those who are persecuted for their religious or political beliefs. This is central to social business, as the social business approach offers opportunities for cooperation for the common good. Furthermore, in the *practice* of social business operations, people of different backgrounds can work together with the same objectives in view, and this is supported by examples that are cited in this paper. As Knitter's point shows, this is also a part of the methodology of defining religion.

4. Case Study: The Blood Foundation and the Fang Valley Development Network

(i) The Blood Foundation

The Blood Foundation is a small NGO that combines a commitment to the spirit of social business (this is still a work in progress, but central to

[2] http://charterforcompassion.org/share/the-charter (accessed 23 November 2011).
[3] http://www.weltethos.org/data-en/c-10-stiftung/13-deklaration.php (accessed 23 November 2011).

the organisation's ethos) with a multi-faith ethic. It is based in the north of Thailand, and carries out a number of educational projects among Shan and Burmese refugees, Hill Tribes, and Thai people in the vicinity of Fang, a town in Chiang Mai province in the 'Golden Triangle' area near the Burmese border. There are many Burmese refugees in the area, of whom many are ethnically Shan (from Shan State – the Shan State Army has been fighting for independence from Burma, a right which was guaranteed to Shan State after 15 years of Burma's independence, but not honoured), or members of other relatively small ethnic groups, such as the Palaung and Lahu peoples. There are also Hill Tribes who have lived in Thailand for generations. What many of them have in common is that they cannot obtain Thai nationality, so they are at the whim of the authorities and their employees. Some work on orange or rice farms for 80-100 baht a day (US$2-3), and routinely have to pay bribes to the police as well as support themselves. Many of them are stateless persons, denied Burmese nationality as well as Thai nationality. According to UNHCR figures in 2009, an absolute majority of the world's stateless persons were in Thailand (3,500,000 out of 6,559,573). There is also poverty among Thai people in this area, which has been strongly supportive of the Red Shirts.

NGOs can be crudely divided into ones that are faith-based, small, and highly motivated on the one hand; secular, large, and highly skilled on the other. The Blood Foundation has a multi-faith ethos: it works with different faith groups and seeks to foster dialogue, interaction, and common action with and for the oppressed. It also seeks to combine the motivation of the faith-based NGOs with the skill sets of the secular ones, and it has been at the forefront of attempts to develop NGO cooperation in the Fang area, as a founder member of the Fang Valley Development Network. Historically it has had particularly close relations with a local Theravada Buddhist temple, Wat Sri Boon Ruang, and it remains a small NGO with a focus on social business, loosely defined.

The structure and activity of the Blood Foundation are always in a state of flux. Until recently, it was involved with the Learn to Live project, which was and remains funded by a Christian NGO (Partners Relief), supported by a secular one (Khom Loy Development Foundation), and executed by Shan Buddhist monks who provide secular education to children in Shan State. This multi-faith ethos is also visible in the Lahuschool, which is funded by the Blood Foundation: it is situated in a Lahu village which is both Christian and animist, which is rare if not unique. The Blood Foundation has recently diversified and formed a

related organisation called World Weavers, and it facilitates cultural exchange programmes in Turkey (Muslim for a Month and Sufi for a Month), and north India (Monk for a Month). The latter is held in a Tibetan Buddhist environment, but is inspired by the original Monk for a Monk programme which was situated in Wat Sri Boon Ruang in Fang. There are also plans for a Christian for a Month programme on the Scottish island of Iona – which was at least in part a response to Muslims who observed that as Christians were able to learn more about Islam through the work of the Blood Foundation, so too should they be able to learn more about Christianity – and, eventually, Sikh for a Week in Punjab.

The spirit of social business can be further elucidated by contextualising it, that is, looking at it in the context of a specific social business (or similar entity within the social economy), rather than as an abstraction. In early August 2011, I distilled some of my notes from several books and articles on social enterprise and international social entrepreneurship (notably Paton 2003, Munoz 2010, Yunus 2010, Perrini and Vurro 2011) into eight points that I judged to be of particular relevance to the Blood Foundation, and to other NGOs and social businesses. These eight points could complement Yunus's seven points as a loose definition of the spirit of social business and the wider social economy:

1. PLANNING is about the organisation; SPONTANEITY is about dealing with others.

2. Need to take risks, but not to be a romantic hero.

3. Need for people with different skills and attitudes (left-brain and right-brain), cf. Belbin's team roles (the Plant – or 'ideas person' – Resource Investigator, Co-ordinator, Shaper, Monitor Evaluator, Team Worker, Implementer, Completer Finisher, and Specialist).[4]

4. MISSION needs to be based on assessment of personal and corporate citizenship, and on an understanding of the environment. Mission can then lead to plans for internationalising, strategic action, adjustment and reinvention, and, ultimately, impact.

5. Need to understand local cultures, create local alliances, and tap into local niches.

6. Consider concept of social franchising.

7. Consider ways to highlight the organisation's value.

8. Outcomes need to be assessed and measurement plays a role.

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[4]Belbin (2010). Previous editions of this book omit the specialist role.

Research and evaluation (not necessarily academic) gives credibility.
Argue for problem- and issue-based criteria, not goal-based criteria.
Remember that there is a double (or triple) bottom line – profit plus people (plus planet).

(ii) The Fang Valley Development Network

The multi-faith ethic and commitment to social enterprise and NGO cooperation can be seen in the emerging work of the Fang Valley Development Network.

While social network analysis tends towards the quantitative, the efficacy of an NGO network can be ethnographically – that is, qualitatively – analysed in terms of *forms* of social interaction (especially exchange and sociability – see Simmel 1971: 43-69, 127-40), trust, and social capital. Ridley-Duff, Seanor and Bull observe that:

> . . . there is agreement amongst writers that social capital implies the development of *trust*, *civic spirit*, *goodwill*, *reciprocity*, *mutuality*, *shared commitment*, *solidarity* and *cooperation*. It offers a way to recognise resources that are difficult to quantify in economic theory, but which are recognised as important (Ridley-Duff, Seanor and Bull 2011: 83-4; original emphasis).

As well as the Blood Foundation, the Fang Valley Development Network includes a number of religious and secular NGOs. Some of the NGOs are international, though most of them are represented by an autonomous local organisation (e.g. Fortune operates as a Shan mental health NGO, but is a part of Salus World, which is based in the USA), while others (e.g. Khom Loy) have been locally established and are fully independent. The membership of the Fang Valley Development Network has grown and changed, but a list of members can be found on its website,[5] and this includes links to the websites of the different NGOs.

In August 2011, I attended the second meeting of the Development Network as part of my fieldwork, to which I have already referred. The meeting consisted of 'trainings' – on Learner Centred Teaching and on the production of fermented plant juice and small group discussions. In these discussions, representatives of the different NGOs talked about difficulties that other members of the network could help with. For example, the Blood Foundation wanted to teach skills to prisoners – written Thai, agriculture, massage – and a representative of UHDP said

[5] http://sites.google.com/site/fangvalley, accessed 2 December 2011.

they would probably be able to help with gardening and some handicrafts. Way of Life were in need of legal help when it came to registering their schools, which UHDP, again, were able to help with by referring them to people with legal expertise. Also, Fortune had nobody with good website skills, which Way of Life was able to help with.

There were other issues discussed, but this shows how the ethos of a development network can quickly translate into practical solutions. Cooperation between NGOs has many potential benefits and rationales. We should not underestimate the importance of friendship, as that is something that generates trust, which is a fundamental *a priori* of civil society. A report of the Cooperation Committee for Cambodia (2009) lists 22 NGO networks that operate locally within the provinces of Cambodia. Each network has a stated 'primary purpose', with anything from one to seven points listed. Fifteen of these points appear in the listing for two or more NGO networks:

1. Cooperation and unity among NGOs;
2. Good relations between NGOs and government (including local government);
3. Coordination on problem solving;
4. Coordination on service delivery (including continuum of services);
5. Share knowledge and experience, and improve communications infrastructure (including internet);
6. Collect information and do research;
7. Advocacy, training in advocacy, building capacity for advocacy by NGOs and at the grassroots, and influencing policy;
8. Human rights (protection and improvement, respect for, culture of, investigation of abuses, enforcement of laws, recommendations) and democracy;
9. Rights of women;
10. Land rights and prevention of land grabbing;
11. Strengthening civil society;
12. Capacity building (e.g. in Human Resources);
13. Fundraising;
14. Raising awareness and support from the community, and changing community attitudes;
15. Wellbeing of people and the environment.[6]

This is really a subject for a separate paper, but here I note that I presented this information to the Fang Valley Development Network, and commented that it could be useful in helping them to define their own purposes, and in helping other people to understand the value of such networks.

5. Conclusion: Elective Affinities

Weber does not argue that the Protestant ethic 'caused' the spirit of capitalism, but that there are 'elective affinities' between the two. It is worth considering Weber's choice of phrase here. He is not referring *merely* to similarities between the two phenomena, and he is certainly not arguing that the spirit of capitalism is an 'unintended consequence' of the Protestant ethic. Rather, he is using Goethe's concept of *Wahlverwandtschaften*, otherwise translated as 'kindred by choice'. Richard Howe (1978) examines Weber's choice of terminology in more detail than is possible here, but somewhat frustratingly concludes that 'Weber never worked out the logical consequences implicit in his usage of elective affinity' (1978: 382). Nevertheless, the notion of kindred by choice can be explicated by observing that the Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism both involve the choice of a formally rational worldview and a praxis of disenchantment and end-means calculation. In examining the elective affinities between the multi-faith ethic and the spirit of social business, then, we are looking for similarities between the two, and for a common choice of worldview and praxis. Simply put, we are not looking for evidence that they have chosen each other (though cf. Howe 1978: 369 and Weber 1968: 341), but for evidence that they have chosen the same things.

Mark Munoz (2010: 18) comments that: 'Several social enterprises have strong moral or spiritual components that are often absent in traditional business ventures'. Although I have argued that the moral component is not what defines religion, I have also observed that it is something that is 'chosen' by those actors within the world religions who are the most committed to inter-faith dialogue and multi-faith activity. This is certainly an area in which there is an elective affinity between the multi-faith ethos and that of social business.

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[6] One NGO is listed separately in two different provinces, but I have only counted it once. The data set is post-coded.

Also, the multi-faith ethic and the spirit of social business both occupy a middle ground between two 'extremes', or 'ideal types', to use Weber's more value-neutral language. The multi-faith ethic is situated between, on the one hand, a fundamentalist or ethnocentric attitude that one's own religion is the true religion, and, on the other, a secular worldview in which religion has little or no practical value. The multi-faith ethic is one in which religion is seen as valuable, and in which the combined value of the world's religions is far greater than the value of any one. The spirit of social business is situated between a capitalist triumphalism and a 'greed-is-good' praxis on the one hand, and a conviction that the problems of poverty can only be solved by destroying capitalism on the other. Socialism may be a valid objective (the spirit of social business, it seems to me, maintains an agnosticism about this), but it is diminished when it becomes the opium of the people. The problem of global poverty needs to be addressed now.

Of course, this means that multi-faith activity and social business can both be criticised from two sides: as clinging to an outdated religiosity on the one hand and pandering to a secular relativism on the other; as crypto-capitalist on the one hand and crypto-socialist on the other. But these criticisms only appear valid because of the way in which multi-faith and social business activities are characterised as 'third sector'. The challenge is to recognise them *sui generis*, as rooted in civil society; defining civil society as *not* state and *not* market does help us to get our heads around what it is, but it also tempts us to confuse this heuristic definition with a more positive conceptualisation of civil society in its own terms.

Looking at the multi-faith ethic on its own terms, and the spirit of social business on its own terms – not in terms of a contrast with fundamentalism or secularism, or capitalism or socialism – we see an emphasis on cooperation, rather than competition or conflict. The history of the cooperative movement in Europe underlines this, which is why it is given so much emphasis in Ridley-Duff and Bull's (2011: 26-36, 47-53, 61-2 *et passim*) introduction to social enterprise. This paper has also drawn attention to the importance of cooperation in social franchising, and to the importance of friendship in multi-faith activity and in NGO cooperation. The exception to the rule of cooperation would appear to be in the United States, where the dominant model is that of the goal-oriented lone-hero entrepreneur, but even this lone hero needs to harness the power of cooperation in order to achieve his or her social-

entrepreneurial goals, so the difference revolves around whether cooperation is an ethos or a tool, not about its necessity to civil society and the social economy. However, whether it is an ethos or a tool, cooperation in multi-faith activity and in social business is something that is with and for the oppressed.

Acknowledgement

I acknowledge the research leave and funding from the University of Southern Queensland that allowed me to carry out the research project on which this article is based. For help and advice with the project and the article, I am especially grateful to Professor Bryce Barker, Dr Rebecca Hazleden, Dr Kelly McWilliam, and two anonymous referees.

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