

I. Abandon Linearism All Ye Who Enter!

“In the past our glorious visions of the future - heaven, paradise, nirvana - were thought to happen after death. The newer thought is that we do not have to die to get there. We are not speaking here of life after death in some mythical heaven, but life more abundant in real time in history. We are speaking of the next stage of our social evolution.”

Barbara Marx Hubbard

"We can't solve problems by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them".

Albert Einstein

“There is no path to Peace. Peace *is* the path”.

Mahatma Gandhi

Chapter 1 - The Philosophy of Sustainable Development

Is the world 'fair'?

Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, September 2013: I'm here working as an English Language teacher for the third time in my life. On the taxi ride to work with two colleagues, we pass the Filipino consulate and as we pull up to pick up a fourth colleague I am shocked to see squatter encampments of Filipinos on both sides of the street, living in cardboard 'homes'. They go about their morning chores. *Slaves*. Technically speaking, in a historical socio-economic analysis, as an economist might define it, they are bonded-labourers, debt-peons, poor people or some other sanitised technical definition; not actually owned by another human being who would be responsible for housing and feeding them but existing in a state of de facto slavery nonetheless.

Most of them arrived sponsored by Saudi Arabian nationals who, for whatever reason, decided at some point to withhold their documentation, and quite possibly their wages. Others (Muslims) came for the *Hajj* Pilgrimage or to perform *Umrah* and overstayed on their visas hoping to find employment. Still others were employed legally in one capacity and then changed jobs but were unable to change their employment visas. They are now cast adrift, part of a non-legal underclass, unwilling or incapable of returning to their native land and unable to find legal employment. As poor migrant labourers they have little political power and the Filipino consulate's powers are limited, and it walks a delicate diplomatic, political and economic tightrope. It does not wish to rock the boat too much with the Saudi Arabian government; the diplomats have no desire to threaten this vital economic lifeline that the Philippine nation has.

There but for the grace of God go I. Or you. My white skin, university education and British passport count for much in the land of the Prophet Mohammed (Peace Be Upon Him). By and large I am treated well and respected by the Saudis I teach and work with. If my parents had been poor uneducated Pakistanis or Bangladeshis it would be a very different story. The reality of the neo-liberal capitalist-consumerist paradigm in the twentieth and twenty-first century is that globally *hundreds of millions* of human beings are slaves and the large majority of them have black or brown skin. Sometimes they are exploited by their fellow countrymen, at other times forced as economic migrants to travel abroad to be exploited by foreigners. Effectively they have no rights; they cannot afford lawyers and finding themselves on the bottom step of an economic pyramid that they have no choice but to engage with. Essentially they are chattel. Until they are free none of us is free, compromise is simply not possible. The neo-liberal capitalist economic paradigm is incapable of freeing them - in fact it *requires* an underclass of poor uneducated workers.

From the time of the first known human civilization, Sumer in modern day Iraq, there have always been slaves; dehumanisation of one ethnic group of homo sapiens by another ethnic group of homo sapiens has a very long, shameful and unbroken history. Easter Islanders based their racism on the size of earlobes; Apartheid South Africa on skin colour; the Roman Empire on citizen / barbarian; Nazi Germany against Gypsies and Jews; white European over Black African in King Leopold's Congolese fiefdom; Colonial (white-European) American against native Americans and black Africans; Bahrain on Sunni / Shia; Northern Ireland on Protestant / Catholic; Rwanda on Hutu / Tutsi; colonists of the British empire in multiple locations against various non-white peoples. Whenever there has been an 'us & them' there has been discrimination. If we were to shed a tear

for every single instance of racial prejudice from every country in the world for the last 6,000 years we would drown in a flood of biblical proportions.

Dehumanisation of 'others' has been used to justify exploitation, genocide, atrocities, sexual abuse and the seizure of land and has enabled elites to coerce / brainwash their poorer countrymen into carrying out their dirty work. As a general rule, ordinary people do not break down the doors of their neighbour's house, murder the stronger members of the household, rape the physically weaker ones before enslaving and/or killing them, steal all their possessions and take their land. But the lessons of history show us that given particular psychological influences in certain contexts and they will do. This is neither just nor sustainable.

The failure of the traditional left and right

While coherent arguments exist that capitalism during *Les Trente Glorieuses* (the post war years 1945-75) was one of the most effective systems for raising huge numbers of people out of poverty and improving living standards, it is also true that gross wealth inequality is an intrinsic part of the capitalist system's DNA. Moreover, with the introduction of the neo-liberal economic capitalist experiment starting in the 1980s, inequality and all its associated negative economic externalities have increased in an unprecedented manner with the top 0.01% increasing their wealth by a staggering amount; this free-market neo-liberal capitalist leopard cannot change its spots. Mass poverty and homelessness, with all their associated negative consequences, are *inevitable* in the neo-liberal capitalist-consumerist system, but to accept this as unavoidable and a reasonable price to pay for any system of human organisation is a poor value decision. As Nelson Mandela once observed,

Like slavery and apartheid...poverty is not natural. It is man-made and can be overcome and eradicated by the actions of human beings.

To follow a value system that implicitly accepts as inevitable and reasonable that a significant minority of fellow homo sapiens are malnourished, hungry and without shelter, dumped on the garbage heap of life, is to live but a shadow of a life. And let no one be in any doubt that their implicit acceptance is not a value judgement. We must start from the basic premise that the system exists to serve the people and not, as is so often the case with the materialist-reductionist ideologies of capitalism and communism, the people serving the system. In the post-capitalist paradigms which are to come, homelessness and poverty cannot be acceptable externalities in any way, shape or form.

The environmental movement, liberals & left-wingers of all shades missed their opportunity to provide an effective plausible alternative to capitalism, connect with ordinary people and build a radical, competent and effective movement for sustained change. Nordhaus and Shellenberger articulated this particularly well in their excellent book *Break Through! From the Death of Environmentalism to the Politics of Possibility* when they said,

Environmental leaders and philanthropists ...treat prosperity as either a distraction from their primary focus of solving the problems of pollution and bad development or as an ancillary concern to be jury-rigged on the existing environmental framework of limiting human intrusions on nature. But improving

living standards for humans can never be a fundamental aspect of environmentalism-only a weakly grafted appendage. That's because environmental thinkers and leaders understand material prosperity as the *cause of but not the solution to* (sic) pollution and degradation.

The traditional message from mainstream environmentalists had been to consume less, re-use and recycle rather than to consume differently, consciously and more intelligently. This has been a failure on several very important levels. Firstly, it has never engaged, nor could it possibly have ever engaged, the ordinary working person on the street whose priority is to pay the next bill and provide for his / her family. Environmental concerns usually register low, if at all, for those individuals struggling to live and provide for their dependents on a daily basis. Secondly it implicitly accepts the materialist-reductionist mind-set; it is thinking firmly rooted within the box, linearism. Thirdly it is not an inspiring rallying cry. Not the strong foundation on which to build a radical, viable and workable alternative to neo-liberal capitalism; it lacks chilli, garlic *and* coriander.

Capitalism as If the World Matters by Jonathon Porritt is a seminal work which makes an invaluable contribution to the long history of works on human socio-economic organisation. Essentially it is a vision of an *optimum capitalist system* and it would be the saviour of capitalism if we could somehow ignore / disregard the, routinely overlooked, negative externalities of capitalism. Lord May the President of the Royal Society in reviewing the work states, "...if capitalism cannot be bent towards sustainability – towards being part of the solution – then I believe there *is* no solution" and this has been the prevailing view of mainstream economists and development professionals of the post-Soviet era. However, the central thesis of the book itself, namely that capitalism can be made to be sustainable and is indeed the only system capable of delivering sustainability, is fundamentally flawed. Porritt states,

This means working with the grain of markets and free choice not against it. It means embracing capitalism as the only overarching system capable of achieving any kind of reconciliation between ecological sustainability, on the one hand, and the pursuit of prosperity, on the other...Logically whether we like it or not, sustainability is therefore going to have to be delivered within that all-encompassing capitalist framework. We don't have time to wait for any big picture ideological successor.

Dead wrong. Not only can capitalism *not* reconcile ecological sustainability and the pursuit of prosperity & personal wellbeing but capitalism is *inherently* unsustainable. Or in other words, *sustainable capitalism is an oxymoron*. While it is true that capitalism has had many successes since the industrial revolution and *some* of its tools are both useful and functional, massive global population increases since the Second World War and changing consumption patterns have led to an almost exponentially greater demand on natural resources that cannot be sustained in the medium-long term with the present paradigm.

Of course there are different forms of capitalism and some brands are less dysfunctional than others. For example the Social-Democrat models of capitalism in Scandinavia, Holland, France and Germany, have undoubtedly helped foster some of the most egalitarian societies that have ever

existed on planet Earth. Anarcho-capitalism (or mafia-capitalism, if you prefer) in Russia, Communist-Party-capitalism in China, winner-takes-all capitalism of the USA and the peculiar unique brand of British-capitalism have created some of the most unequal and dysfunctional societies on Earth. All forms are intimately linked with arms dealing and therefore the trade in heroin, cocaine and other abusive narcotics and are ultimately corrupt. Look in an economic textbook and you will find scant discussion of these issues, and yet capitalism without endemic corruption, drug trafficking or the arms trade is fantasy capitalism. Like Eggs Benedict without the eggs, Beef Wellington without the beef or *Coq au Vin sans coq*, it simply does not exist.

This does *not* require some long convoluted and complex conspiracy theory, rather a simple understanding of the logic of capitalism: -

Maximize profits at the expense of *everything* else

Concentrate the profits in as few hands as is feasible

Offset the negative externalities to others *by whatever means necessary*

With this logic as your driving force special loans and trade ‘agreements’, coups, assassinations, proxy wars and genocide simply become tools to be used when necessary and covered up or kept quiet about when quality journalists come sniffing about. It is not hard to find examples; Guatemala 1954; Vietnam – The Ten Thousand Day War; Chile 1973; Afghanistan various times; Democratic Republic of Congo - ongoing. Indeed, John Perkins a self-confessed former economic hit man sets out the blueprints used in some detail in his works. Morality does not enter into the equation, it’s just business. *It’s. Just. Business.*

What constitutes a sustainable paradigm?

Philosopher and Humanist Luc Ferry once observed, "I know that this term, Sustainable Development is obligatory but I find it also absurd or rather so vague that it says nothing". So let us dispel this vagueness and ask the questions; Who is it for? What is its purpose? What does it say about the human condition? And how can it guide us?

How can sustainability be defined? In a finite closed system, in this case Planet Earth (Gaia), there is a finite carrying capacity to support a finite human population. Exactly what this population level might be would depend massively on the population’s patterns of consumption which, in essence, is a fairly straightforward equation.

Population X average consumption = Total consumption

Of course, it is much more complicated than the equation above suggests because different economic classes, societies and groups consume differently, sustainably and unsustainably in varying degrees. But for the sake of simplicity the equation has some functionality and validity. If total consumption is above the carrying capacity of the closed system, in this case Planet Earth (Gaia), total consumption must either move below the carrying capacity or the environment will degrade or collapse. There are literally no other possible outcomes. In its simplest form consuming above the carrying capacity of a system is the very definition of unsustainable.

A truly sustainable system is not a linear progression through the history of socio-economics with the odd tweak here and there, it is a *paradigm change* of philosophy, education, psychology, values, organisation and technology; *nothing else will suffice*. *The Tao of Sustainable Development* proposes that a paradigm change of socio-economic political philosophy is necessary to deliver long term environmental sustainability *and* social justice. Furthermore, it proposes that there are five minimum characteristics to achieve sustainable societies. These characteristics are;

Sustainable Agriculture and Animal Husbandry

Cyclical Resource Use (C2C) and Advanced Technology

Individual and Collective Psychological Freedom

Effective & Egalitarian State Forms and Non-State Forms (NSFs)

Holistic, Compassionate and Research-Based Education Systems

A permaculture system of agriculture and ethical and sustainable animal husbandry are absolutely necessary to produce enough food for over 7 billion people without degrading the soil and wider ecology on which it depends. Advanced technology explicitly includes; clean green renewable-energy, effective waste-management systems and sustainable housing with a low or zero environmental impact. Whilst humans would continue to manipulate our environment, as we have done since time immemorial, the manner in which we do so would be fundamentally different; based on scientific knowledge/research, long-term thinking and respect for the Earth. A scientific understanding of carrying capacity of the environment and cradle to cradle (C2C) resource usage would be an intrinsic part of the system. Moreover, wise-intelligent use of advanced technology in the Sustainable paradigm absolutely and unconditionally rejects the arms trade.

The sustainable covenant

The purpose of Sustainable Development must be to deliver a framework whereby every human has ready access to all basic necessities – clean air, water, food, housing, sanitation, sustainable housing, health care and energy – whilst simultaneously remaining below the carrying capacity of the natural environment both locally and globally. Additionally, it must provide bodily and mental freedom as well as delivering quality educational opportunities to develop a broad range of skills. Moreover, it must seek to raise the consciousness of *all humans* so that negative emotional and mental-health issues are a fraction of current levels. It must also maximise opportunities for leisure time and for activities which lead to the flow-state. Humans must evolve so that we might step into the cosmos and (hypothetically) greet our extra-terrestrial brothers and sisters as a peace-loving race.

War, sexual violence, domestic abuse, poverty, debt, slavery, homelessness, unemployment, illiteracy and lack of education must become pieces to view in the museum of human organisation. These noble goals must be achieved whilst living in balance with the natural environment and any pollution produced as a negative externality of productive economic activity must be below the local carrying capacity in every locale around the planet. A tall order indeed, but if this is not our

aim what can we expect for the future of the human race? Subcomandante Marcos of the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) articulates what this might mean thus,

In our dreams we have seen another world, an honest world, a world decidedly fairer than the one in which we now live. We saw that in this world there was no need for armies; peace, justice and liberty were so common that no one talked about them as far-off concepts, but as things such as bread, birds, air, water, like book and voice

A new covenant must exist between state and individuals based on compassion & wisdom and not oppression & deception. Furthermore, these relationships must be based on reciprocity with agreed sets of rights and responsibilities for individuals and states. For those who wish to utilise the many benefits of the (effective & egalitarian) state; fair laws, protection from violence, sustainable housing, food, water and energy, wide range of work & leisure options, would accept an independent judiciary and police with a legal monopoly on violence. Rights & responsibilities of citizens walking hand in hand with the rights & responsibilities of the state. Moreover, states would accept that those who wish to live in small autonomous communities, Non-State Forms (NSF), should be allowed to do so.

States recognising the rights of well-informed mentally balanced adult humans and their families, if they have one, to live outside of the state and experiment with NSFs would be the norm. Effective NSFs must exist for those individuals who wish to forgo the benefits of a state and live together with a minimum of formal rules and no police force with a monopoly on sanctioned violence. Non-state forms, by necessity, would be much smaller than states and therefore in all likelihood account for a substantially smaller part of the planet's human population. Individuals might choose to temporarily live in a NSF for whatever reasons and return to live in a state at some later point in life.

Psychological freedom, whilst difficult to articulate adequately in words, is perhaps, the single most important of the five factors and it owes as much, if not more, to feelings & emotion rather than logic. Societies and individuals would address & seek healing for negative psychological patterns of behaviour, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), mental illness and emotional trauma in all its grim myriad forms. Furthermore, humanity must recognise the destructive potential of those individuals who demonstrate psychopathic traits and channel their skills and abilities into constructive pastimes. Moreover, those activities (including but not limited to; sports; music; fine arts; meditation) that foster a flow state would become central activities which replace (intra-state & inter-state) war and domestic violence.

These five parts; Permaculture systems of Agriculture and Animal Husbandry; Cyclical Resource use and Advanced Technology; Individual and Collective Psychological Freedom; Effective & Egalitarian State Forms and Non-State Forms (NSF); Holistic, Compassionate and Research-Based Education Systems, are the essence of *The Tao of Sustainable Development*. All are explored in detail in part two of this work, which is a starting point and not a finishing line. By necessity (we are, after all, discussing future possibilities) certain factors must be discussed in general rather than in specific terms whilst others, such as the optimum population size for a NSF can be discussed in much more specific detail. The primary aim of this work is to reframe the debate

around Sustainability, to facilitate a questioning of the assumptions that we have about human organisation and investigate alternatives to the prevailing global economic paradigm of neo-liberal capitalism; to look at the world with new eyes. Secondly it is to empower groups & individuals with a simultaneously realistic and glorious vision of the human future. Thirdly it is to suggest some possible starting actions to bring about the transformations required for our thriving human future.

Sustainable Development is thus synonymous with a quest for Utopia, and if not to aim for Utopia - *Technologically Advanced Effective Compassionate Egalitarian Systems* - why bother at all? Why settle for a corrupt, inefficient, discriminatory and grossly-hierarchical system even if it is marginally better than the other corrupt, inefficient, discriminatory and grossly-hierarchical systems on offer? Winston Churchill once observed “It has been said that democracy is the worst form of government - except all the others that have been tried.” But surely there must come a time when we Humans draw a line in the sand and say “*Less bad is simply not good enough*”.

[Read the rest and purchase on Amazon](#)