

“A time of consequences” – global warming and the domist imperative for a new political economy

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ABSTRACT

In his film and book “An Inconvenient Truth”, former US Vice-President Al Gore talks of the world entering a “time of consequences” based upon the effects of global warming.

The failure of existing political economies of both the Left and Right has contributed to the present problems. Such repeated failures of both politics and economics require the development of new approaches that place human development rather than economic development at their centre, based upon what the author describes as the *economics of eternity*.

The conceptual basis of such a new political economy is laid out as the *domist imperative* with the underlying five principles addressing the meaning of human existence, the abolition of work, the free provision of goods and services, the end of war and the removal of the fear of beauty.

Keywords: domism, economics of eternity, sustainability, political economy, global warming

INTRODUCTION

In his film and book “An Inconvenient Truth”, former US Vice-President Al Gore talks of the world entering a “time of consequences” based upon the effects of global warming. Newton’s Third Law of Motion states clearly that “For every action there is an equal and opposite reaction.” Therefore, the causes of global warming will have consequences of equally large proportions, both for human beings and the other lifeforms with which we share the planet.

The origins of this warming in the historical processes of industrialization and continued forms of economic development, are symptomatic of a profound refusal to accept that actions inevitably lead to consequences, whether people accept this or not. It is symptomatic of a particular belief system (or lack of it) that individuals refuse to accept responsibility for their actions, externalising these in much the same way as costs are externalised by economists as ‘someone else’s problem’.

Whereas denial of reality may be a strategy useful to political leaders in order to ensure their own political survival (*short-term self-interest*), its long-term effect for the human species is catastrophic. This is not only in terms of the increased weather events attributable to warming, such as increased rainfall, flooding, landslips, and cloud cover, but more importantly in the deaths and illnesses that result from these. It could be argued that governments that refuse to ratify or implement the Kyoto Protocol are culpable in these deaths, in much the same way as a charge of corporate manslaughter can arise out of wilful negligence by decision-makers. Simply ignoring facts and covering one’s ears, is not a policy, but a dysfunctional state. Mistaken ways of thinking – thinking based on falsehood – bring their own consequences, and a society or species that replicates this, is assured of its own demise. What is needed then, is a way of thinking which is based on reality and the truth, rather than delusion and lies, or the maintenance of individual or collective self interest at all costs.

This crisis in both political and economic legitimacy, is already leading to transformation and polarisation of entire states within the human family. Power begets its own perpetuation by whatever means it can get away with. The supremacy of the political over the individual leads to the demand for

total control over every aspect of life – the dystopias of Huxley's *Brave New World* or the Orwell's nightmare described in his book *1984*.

In contrast, utopian thinking is denigrated and dismissed as untenable. This does not however prevent those in power from postulating their own new approaches for the human future - whether it be the 'New World Order' of the far right or 'Communism with a human face' of the far left. It seems extraordinary that the human race is being driven down a road to destruction which could be considered as being driven by pure evil in an unhuman form (Korten, 1995), desirous of human destruction or subjugation to some greater plan rather than human development, and all stage managed by the global ruling élite or what Pilger (2003) describes as "The New Rulers of the World".

Calls to reduce emissions, while worthwhile if not essential in themselves, need to be supplemented by further actions in identifying and removing the causes of the present malaise which has been caused by large-scale industrialisation over the past two hundred years and a failure to understand the consequences of such activity. We must learn from the mistakes of the past if we are not to repeat them to the point of self-destruction.

This inability to preserve the basis upon which human life exists, is the ultimate crime against humanity in that it moves beyond genocide to extinction of the entire human species. What is required therefore, is an approach to human existence that is based upon the ability to preserve the means of continued life in perpetuity (to eternity) – a new economics of eternity.

Within the field of economics, this means approaches to sustainability and sustainable economics, in ways that move beyond the findings of the Brundtland Commission of the United Nations in 1987, beyond the limitations of current Western supply and demand free market models, or the Central Planning beloved of the Communists, as well as beyond the considerations of Triple Bottom Line economic, environmental and social accounting. (It was a common criticism of Communist accounting that it was incapable of calculating the true costs of production. In much the same way, neither are Western methods even when the Triple Bottom Line methods of financial, environmental and social costs are factored in. This is simply because so many of the costs are 'externalised' to areas which have no voice whether it is the waste dumped on land, sea and air or the additional human illnesses and plant diseases caused for example, by toxins.)

Within the field of business, this means that the primary function of business will not be its own perpetuation for example, in ways that can be described as 'cancerous' (Bakan, 2004) but rather in the provision of goods that are 'built to last' (rather than built-in obsolescence) and services that meet human need rather than the profit motive of those delivering the service.

Within the fields of philosophy, social philosophy and political economy, it means a reinstatement of the individual as a unique expression of creation and with inalienable rights exceeding those of any form of government, business or other social construct.

LESSONS FROM THE PAST

In order to understand the future, we must study the past. In the same way, in order that we may cure our present sickness, we must understand its causes and symptoms. Therefore a study of the way in which human societies have structured themselves and provided for their needs – what has become known as the study of *political economy* – is essential to the present purpose of creating new forms or moving beyond into new conceptualisations of what is needed.

Although much of what we now understand to be political economy (see for example, Barber, 1991) originates from the eighteenth century and later, with the works of such writers as Adam Smith (1776) (generally regarded as the father of economics) with his emphasis on production, (especially agriculture) and distribution, it has its origins much further back in the Ancient Greek world of Plato and his *Republic*, which sought to describe the perfect human society and how it should be governed, together with the principles upon which it should be based, including a discussion of both individual and social justice and the growth of the three primary virtues of Temperance, Wisdom and Courage.

In the present world, Plato would have no problem in identifying many of the characteristics he equated with tyranny, such as injustice, incompetent rulers, and the tendency to be corrupted by power and the formation of oligarchies where power is moved among a select group. In contrast, Popper's (1945) critique of the Republic, emphasised the totalitarian tendencies to seek control over all activities – much as happens today.

This appeal to the elucidation of first principles, is found in the writings of others including More's *Utopia* of 1516, including his intolerance of atheists on the grounds that they could not be trusted since they were unable to accept any higher authority or principles other than themselves.

The economics of the state

From the eighteenth century onwards, the focus moved to the economies of the nation state – hence the 'political' aspect of political economy. Adam Smith's (1776) book on the 'Wealth of Nations' attempted to both describe and prescribe activities which led to prosperity for a whole society.

When Smith wrote of the importance of self-interest as the driver of economic activity, it was within the context of his earlier work (in 1759) which stressed the importance of 'sympathy'; to achieve socially beneficial results. Thus unfettered greed or selfishness, will have negative outcomes – as we see today – unless it is based on an ethical standpoint that is built upon a sense of social justice. In this Smith was no doubt aware of the perils of wealth for its own sake (the miser's misery) compared to wealth as having a philanthropic function outside of its production and the need for 'enlightened self-interest' which has a broader horizon.

Later works again return to the assumptions underpinning economic approaches including the work of Marx (1848) and his explicit identification of social classes and the extraction of surplus value as the basis of modern capitalism.

By the late 19th century, Alfred Marshall, Professor of Political Economy at Cambridge University, attempted to move economics away from the study of market activity to one of human behaviour. Marshall's conception of *supply and demand*, has defined the present market reality.

The work of 20th century economists spans a broad diversity from the work of John Maynard Keynes (1936) through the monetarism and neoliberalism of von Hayek (1944) to the work of Schumacher (1973) who subtitled his work 'Small is Beautiful' with the addition "A study of economics as if people mattered."

The economics of the corporation

The study of the nation state as the major vehicle for economic growth has now shifted to that of the multinational corporation, given the size of the latter in comparison to many countries. This is evidenced in the work of Korten (1995) and Bakan (2004).

The post-capitalist and post-corporate world

Drucker (1993) and Korten (1999) have addressed this world from their very different perspectives, but this has been in the shadow of globalization which has been accelerating since the Bretton Woods Agreement in 1944.

International political economy (IPE) or global economics

Globalization has seen increasing interdependence between both nation states and corporations for the production and manufacture of goods, as well as their distribution. The economies of scale offered by large-scale production, allows large producers to cut their costs and thereby drive smaller producers to oblivion in a process of industry convergence that has been seen in industry after industry from aircraft manufacture to food production.

In their prophetic 1991 book 'Saving the Planet: How to Shape an Environmentally Sustainable Global Economy', Brown, Flavin and Postel discuss many of the issues which have now become commonplace from the effects of global warming to sustainable economics, as well as practical ways of bringing about a better world.

In the (2002) Report of the International Forum on Globalization, alternatives to economic globalization are presented by various authors. Ten Principles for Sustainable Societies are also stated

as being: (1) New Democracy; (2) Subsidiarity; (3) Ecological Sustainability; (4) Common Heritage; (5) Cultural Diversity; (6) Human Rights; (7) Jobs Livelihood., Employment; (8) Food, Security and Safety; (9) Equity; and (10) The Precautionary Principle.

The rise of organisations such as Worldwatch (2007) is evidence of a rising tide of opinion against traditional forms of (mis)understanding economic realities. Worldwatch provides a different perspective to that offered by politicians and their spokespersons: *“One focus of Worldwatch work on economics has been government spending and taxation policies. Currently, governments subsidize environmentally harmful activities such as driving, logging, and mining, tilting the economy in the direction of resource waste and pollution. Taxing harmful activities instead would force consumers and companies to pay the full environmental costs of their actions and free up billions of dollars to support wind power, recycling, and other technologies and practices essential to building a sustainable industrial economy.”*

The economics of eternity

Beyond the power of corporations to control supply and to fix prices, lies the need to see the world other than through the narrow interpretation of business and economics. This dominance of the past has led to a failure of human development on the altar of financial success.

An economics of eternity is based upon the need not only to ensure sustainability but also human development in terms of meeting human needs in more efficient and less wasteful ways than those offered by the free market or the planned economy – both of which are predicted on the need for individuals to relinquish power to others.

THE DOMIST IMPERATIVE FOR AN ECONOMICS OF ETERNITY

It is my contention that simply striving for sustainability, while eminently desirable, is not enough. What is needed is a new economics, an *economics of eternity*, which is capable of unifying continued human existence and development with the continued existence and development of other life-forms which hitherto have suffered extinction due to human activity. It would be a strange irony, if humanity was to suffer the same fate as other species which have similarly suffered from the destruction of their habitats as a result of human activity: human extinction caused by human folly.

The failure of economics as a discipline can only be redeemed through the creation of an approach that is capable of ensuring human survival. The domist imperative has been described (Rudzki, 2006) as answering the question as to what is the meaning of life? From this follows that we must find ways of being that are capable of ensuring our survival as a species. Within domism, this is defined within the Five Key Principles:

1. *The highest purpose of human life is the contemplation of the eternal and the infinite. The highest social good [the ‘meaning of life’] is the realization of the potential of all human beings in their physical, emotional, intellectual, social and spiritual dimensions. Anything less is a denial of our human capacity and therefore diminishes us all.*
2. *The primary function of business and government is to ensure that all goods and services essential for human life are provided at zero cost or below.*
3. *All work should be abolished.*
4. *All forms of war and violence are a crime against humanity. Those that engage in it are criminally insane and deserving of isolation and rehabilitation both for their own well-being and the safety of others.*
5. *Be not afraid of beauty.*

As an approach, domism is not ‘the answer’, but rather begins to ask ‘the question(s)’, attempting to move beyond the confines of set ways of thinking in order to see that not only are their alternatives, but several alternatives possible in varying amounts of desirability from dystopias to utopias, whether these be for example, the Buddhist Nirvana, the Christian ‘coming of the Kingdom’ or the Islamic promise of paradise. What is clear, is the emptiness and destructive power of the materialistic pursuit of

consumerism as the highest good - 'having' rather than 'being' in a form of imprisonment by one's own possessions. It is hardly surprising then that those seeking spiritual enlightenment - such as monks and nuns - have taken vows of poverty as a means of liberating themselves from the wickedness and snares of the world.

CONCLUSION

If business and economics is to have any relevance in the 21st century to the human condition, then it must move beyond its own limitations of thought and practice, in much the same way as the shift from mercantilism to free trade brought about increasingly rapid globalization. That global-scale activity is possible in the business field is evidence that it can also be achieved in other areas, whether it is the successful eradication of smallpox or in a commitment to realise new approaches to meeting universal human needs for sustenance, shelter, healthcare, education and all the other activities that bring joy to existence.

There is an Old English saying that "Fine words butter no parsnips" meaning that words by themselves are incapable of leading to beneficial actions. Empty words and empty promises serve to destroy hope, what is needed is hope based on the realisation of promises.

The challenge to economists then is to liberate themselves from the restrictive forms of the past and to invent new ways of realising human potential. Anything less is a denial of the potential for human development at the expense of the empty promises of economic development.

People come first, politics second, economics third.

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