

INTRODUCTION

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A Feasible Economic Paradigm

On 27 November 2007 on CBC radio, David Suzuki had a message for all of us. He said that we need “a feasible economic paradigm” to deal with the problem of sustainability.

Such a “feasible economic paradigm” is one that cannot rely on the market economy. Economic doctrine has been developed entirely on the basis of the challenges of production and exchange with little regard for the matter of distribution. The main distributive responsibility lies with the exchange system in the market place, via a networking mechanism of governing, that which we (usually favorably) refer to as the market economy, with profit as the mainstream incentive.

Under the umbrella of the profit-driven market economy, we have learnt how to take from nature, the environment and people without coming to the realization as a society and as a civilization, that if humanity is to continue in this manner, it needs a sustainable economy. The problem is simple enough to appreciate — we know how to take, but we do not wish to, and perhaps do not even know how to, give back.

Have We Put Back Equivalent Value for What We Have Taken?

Grassroots movements have politicized the environmental concerns of today and for the future, but consumers still rely on massive energy consumption and resource-sapping products to maintain the high quality of living to which they have become accustomed by attractive marketing

techniques. What is needed is a global, yet personal mechanism of accounting that engenders human needs, the constraints on natural resource and environmental concerns. It is by no means a new story, but sadly a very old one with often catastrophic results. The world will come closer to the solution of equitable distribution when the personal incentive for all individuals to “give back” takes precedence over the incentive to “take from” the environment, and others. Relying on the market systems to put back what we have taken, when it is too often assumed that it is our unalienable right to make a profit if it is within our power to do so, is extremely difficult for this author at least to believe. Individuals must make a personal choice to assume responsibility for the stewardship of the remarkable life on this wonderful planet.

Profit, True or False?

What is generally considered to be “profit” consists, in large part, of the unaccounted costs to people, resources and the environment, in addition to the currently accounted for costs required to bring a product or service to the consumer. The continued practice of denying these extra, undisclosed components will result in an inevitable, eventually irreversible drain on our non-renewable resources unless innovation and creativity surpass consumption. The pressing issue of poverty will remain a significant challenge for a very long time. While the plight of the poor has improved in many places, especially in the so-called “developed nations,” many still live often unseen, tragic lives blighted by poverty, and throughout much of the globe abject poverty is often the norm, accompanied by an average age of mortality that would be considered tragic in developed countries. Where is the system of justice to provide these individuals with the basic requirements of life? The Market system relies on “blind” justice for distribution, and the end result is the limitless accumulation of profit for some, acquired from the undeclared costs to humanity and the natural environment. Such a process, if allowed to continue unchecked, leads to continued destitution for those out of reach of the “justice” available only to those playing the market game. So if we cannot depend on a profit-chasing economy to provide a fair and equitable distribution system, can we rely on governments?

Can We Rely on Government for Re-distribution?

A perfect government would ensure a fair and equitable distribution of resources, but as no system is perfect, no government has ever succeeded in achieving this. Karl Marx and his followers and successors overturned the distributive system of many countries, most importantly, Russia, and we are all aware of the results. China, under the leadership of its Governing Party, has made great economic progress in the post-Mao era. Some might point to its production of at least 15 new billionaires (American dollars) in a recent two-year period as a sign of its success, yet, for all its claims of socialism, China has yet to contend with the problem of child beggars in the streets of its major cities. And yet the accusing finger of poverty can be pointed in many other directions as well. Where is the justification for the US to spend over US\$600 billion in an unjustified war in a foreign country like Iraq, when that war has done little or nothing to improve the lives of the Iraqis, and cost perhaps hundreds of thousands of human lives without first addressing poverty and environment damage at home?

One might argue that in a democratic nation, it is up to the citizens of that nation to engage in the political process to prevent a recurrence of the unjustified blunders that end up causing more harm than good. For individuals to take part meaningfully in the decision-making processes of their country requires education, and in the US, for instance, a residence — property ownership in effect, to register to vote, leaving the homeless perpetually disenfranchised from the process. To be a candidate for a political office without money is out of the question. Where does election money come from? The environment, resources and poor people have no money to support candidates who would be concerned about their issues. Only those who have money can further their schemes to get money to support their candidates. Leaders of other forms of governments more conveniently use their position of military strength to eliminate those who question them or create symbolic laws to get what they want.

It is All About Making Changes

It was in Belfast, Ireland, when I was invited to a posh country club for a steak dinner. The waiter asked me: “How would like your steak? Well

done? Medium? Or rare?” I answered: “Done well.” The difference between well done and done well is simple: the former one is that the steak will be fully cooked. “Done well,” is an assurance from the chef that the steak will be prepared to suit the expectations of the best. This may mean so little to what I intend to put forth, only a simple reality which means we can make a change with no great effort, but that would make a great difference.

In a similar sense, the aim we have is not to promote capitalism or communism, socialism or libertarianism, Catholicism or Buddhism or atheism, or any of the myriad other philosophies that humankind has produced, promoted, fought for and died for. What we aim for is to create a better world for the future, for all our children, and our children’s children. How we do so, is less important than that we do so. In short, how do we want to conduct our stewardship of the world? We want it done well.

A Candle of Hope

This book brings together an impressive list of international experts, all of whom share the goal of a brighter future for our descendants and ourselves. All contributors draw on their experience and expertise to discuss the obstacles and opportunities that will contribute to formulating feasible solutions towards a sustainable economy for humanity.

For my own part, I concur with David Suzuki, to say that a *feasible economic paradigm* is one that must change our mindset to realize that we are all part of the Earth, but that we don’t “own” it. It is there for us as well as for the future. A healthy environment is integral to any sustainable economic solution. We must learn to share in the fruits of labor of those who have contributed their lives to make a better life for us, while restoring what Nature needs to survive and continue to serve all living beings on the planet Earth. To reiterate the message printed on the cover of “Entrepreneurism”:

*We are here to serve you, your children, and their children’s children.
When they are here, we will serve them the same way we serve you.*

To achieve these lofty goals, it is a necessity to change our mindset from what we who have become so used to the primacy of the market economy,

are so accustomed to. The term “Profit” should never be part of our thinking, since there really is no such thing as profit, unless our costing system is able to recognize all costs including the cost of human efforts above and beyond their minimal wage compensation, repayment of environmental and nature’s contribution and restoration of resources above and under the ground. Although accounting professionals have skillfully replaced “Profit” by “Financial Income,” they have not replaced what is in people’s minds. “Residual” must become the reality. The allocation of residual is the decision of those who have stewardship responsibility and accountability. Full disclosure is required for comparability and reporting purposes. We need to fully recognize that there is an unaccounted cost to everything, and it is not possible to “get something from nothing.”

Is this difficult? Of course it is. Changing the world always is. However, I leave you to read the collected wisdom contained in this book, with the following thought in mind. “A Candle of Hope” was a holiday greeting message sent to me by Catherine Jiong Gu (a student of mine). It was a pictorial e-card with four candles, of which only the fourth candle was lit. The first candle represented Peace, the second Love, and the third Confidence, As long as the fourth candle, representing Hope remained lit, the possibility of restoring light to each of the other candles existed. Likewise, while most realize it is impossible to replace the market economy, we at least consider the possibility of a better solution as a candle of Hope.

The End of a Beginning