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The Government of Sustainable Development

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Abstract

The difficulties of achieving sustainable development reflect a number of internal tensions between its three basic pillars of economic development, social development and environmental protection. One such tension is evident in the adoption of economic development and social development as separate pillars, which challenges the view that the purpose of economic development is to achieve social development. Another arises through economic valuation of the environment, which removes the distinction between environmental and economic goals, and questions their treatment as separate pillars. A third tension derives from the failure to draw a distinction between the development of developing countries, and the development of developed ones. All these tensions are shown to be symptomatic of difficult issues being avoided. An emphasis on neo-liberal economic theory avoids the challenging implications of classical theory, while in the environmental sphere, generalised assumptions about the potential impacts of climate change, biodiversity loss and resource depletion avoid discussion of differential effects which may lead to increasing international conflict. Closer examination of these issues revives doubts about whether the conservation of the global commons and the development of developing countries can both be achieved without stronger and more democratic forms of global governance, amounting to global government.

Introduction

Sustainable development has become an almost universally accepted norm, yet still presents major problems of implementation. The World Conservation Strategy of 1980, the Brundtland report of 1987, the Rio Earth Summit of 1992 and the Johannesburg conference of 2002 have all reinforced what was said at Stockholm in 1972, that 'technological man' is 'on a course which could alter dangerously, and perhaps irreversibly, the natural systems of his planet upon which his biological survival depends'; while most of the world's population have 'hardly raised their claims on the planet above those of neolithic man' (Ward and Dubos, 1972, p.46-47). In the three decades and more since the Stockholm conference, the concept of sustainable development has evolved considerably, while the problems it needs to solve remain unchanged.

These difficulties of implementation are associated with the simplicity of the Brundtland definition of sustainable development, which 'obscures underlying complexities and contradictions' (Redclift, 2005). Many of these are not new, or likely ever to be fully resolved. Development is a dynamic process, which might reasonably be hoped to continue indefinitely, while continuing to create tensions of this nature. In consequence, many commentators have come to 'view the pursuit of sustainability as a long-term, open-ended process' (Farrell, Kemp, Hinterberger, Rammel and Ziegler, 2005). This risks confusing sustainable development with the pursuit of sustainable development. If the pursuit of a sustainable open-ended process is itself allowed to be open-ended, development can never be made sustainable, and the catastrophes feared at Stockholm must become increasingly probable.

While the tensions inherent in the development process are likely to continue, the message from Stockholm, oft repeated, is that they have become particularly acute at this particular point in human history. Widespread awareness of the potential environmental consequences of the current development pattern has failed to stimulate effective action. The interpretation of those consequences in economic terms has been no more successful. This paper therefore explores the environmental and economic tensions of sustainable development in terms of their social and political consequences. It finds powerful arguments for re-orienting the debate, towards difficult choices that are not being made, or more dangerously, are being made by default.

Economic Development and Social Development

The three pillar approach to sustainable development (extended to four with the institutional pillar of governance) has done little to reduce the complexity of the concept, and has itself introduced a contradiction. The approach was developed with the aim of identifying areas in which social, economic and environmental goals interact, such that environmental issues might be more fully integrated into development decisions (Holmberg and Sandbrook, 1992). To an extent the opposite has occurred, by allowing a distinction to be drawn not only between social and economic goals, but between social and economic development. The Johannesburg Plan of Implementation defines social development and economic development as separate pillars (United Nations, 2002, p.8). Intentionally or not, this challenges the view that the purpose of economic development is to achieve social development.

The Johannesburg interpretation of sustainable development is unclear about the meaning of economic development, but it does identify economic growth as an essential component. It is

widely agreed that the quality of growth, not just its quantity, is a significant factor in improving the quality of human life (World Bank, 2000). Growth is however taken to be a necessary condition for development, even if not a sufficient one. Many scholars have contested this (Mill, 1848; Mishan, 1969; Georgescu-Roegen, 1971; Daly, 1992; Offer, 2000). In practice, economic growth can have adverse effects on the quality of life as well as beneficial ones, to yield social results that may be random, or even negative overall. It may therefore be argued that the economic component of sustainable development is rightly regarded as a separate pillar, with a purpose that is widely understood, but left unstated. Whatever its effects might be on improving the quality of life, economic growth is necessary to maintain economic stability (Daly and Townsend, 1993).

Although the relationship between growth and stability is rarely discussed in relation to sustainable development, it is a central component of economic theory. Neo-classical theory inherits from Adam Smith's classical theory a recognition that 'the increase of stock, by increasing the competition, necessarily reduces the profit' (Smith, 1776). Smith identified a similar effect on wages, so that if an equilibrium were ever reached, 'both the wages of labour and the profits of stock would probably be very low'. The rest of his analysis concentrated on how profits and wages could both be maintained through the growth of foreign trade, while David Ricardo added that 'this tendency, the gravitation as it were of profits, is happily checked at repeated intervals by the improvements in machinery' (Ricardo, 1821, p.78-79). Hence, economic growth through technological innovation and growing international trade came to be understood as an essential requirement of a market economy, not to increase the rate of profit or the real wage rate, but to stop them falling. Mishan (1969) has argued that a similar effect is now achieved by the marketing of new fashions, not to satisfy needs or wants, but to create them, and hence to stimulate the demand that is needed for growth. Profits and real wages both vary in proportion to the rate of growth, so that this is often 'considered the only relevant parameter' (Spangenberg, 2005). Under classical economic theory, continual economic growth is essential, or profits and wages would both collapse, and the economy would collapse with them.

In many respects the market economy has performed extremely well. Despite its tendency to generate changes in society for economic rather than social reasons, it can justifiably be claimed that in any respect other than environmental conservation it has performed better than any other economic system that has yet been tried. Although Marx (1887) seized on Smith's and Ricardo's analysis to bolster his famed prediction that 'capitalist production begets, with the inexorability of a law of Nature, its own negation', the centrally planned economies of the Soviet system proved to be less durable, with a worse social and environmental performance. Nonetheless, the economic pillar of sustainable development must be treated with caution. It a separate pillar from social development. It has a separate purpose, to sustain the market economy. If the market economy proves to be unsustainable for other reasons, it will have to be brought under tighter control, or some other workable economic system will have to emerge to replace it.

Environmental Values

Free market principles have in general conserved environmental resources more effectively than central planning, but still suffer from their own inherent limitations. Adam Smith described natural habitat as the 'unimproved wilds'. It has since been recognised that the environment has other values than that obtainable from converting it to agriculture, with a range of techniques available to value it (Winpenny, 1995). This challenges another aspect of

the sustainable development framework. When any particular environmental quality is given an economic value, this moves it from the environmental sphere to the economic sphere. For qualities such as agricultural fertility, this may be a necessary step in making a rational decision. However, when all environmental qualities are valued in economic terms, the environmental pillar of sustainable development becomes redundant.

Economic valuation of the environment has generated a long-running debate, revolving around the ethics embedded in the Rio Declaration's anthropocentric first principle, the extent to which human values are economic values, and the substitutability of human-made capital for natural capital (Hopwood, Mellor and O'Brien, 2005; Spangenberg, 2005). In effect, the debate is over whether sustainable development should or should not have an environmental pillar. The fact that it does have such a pillar is a powerful argument for adopting the position that while it is appropriate for some environmental qualities to be valued in economic terms, others should not be. Meanwhile, environmental conservation and exploitation continue to be determined by a combination of political processes and the behaviour of an imperfect market.

Any environmental quality that is actually traded in the market has a human value that is measured automatically as an economic value, defined by a market which reflects an average of the values that individual people place on it, weighted by their purchasing power. This does not apply to certain public goods, such as clean air, which cannot be traded in the market. Decisions on their conservation or use are therefore made on behalf of the public by its political representatives, on the basis of values which do not need to be expressed in economic terms, but can be, in part, when doing so contributes to the soundness of the decision. This is not necessarily the case for other public goods, such as biodiversity. Biodiversity is a public good, whose use is non-exclusive, but there is a market for it. The tropical rainforest can be bought and sold. Its biological diversity is declining, because too few people value it highly enough to buy it, other than as a source of timber or agricultural land.

The underlying tensions of sustainable development run deeper than the question of whether environmental qualities should be valued in economic terms, and if so, how. The biodiversity of the tropical rainforest is subject to market failures and imperfections (Bulte and Engel, 2005), but could nonetheless be secured immediately, in either of two ways. Individual people could combine to outbid logging companies in negotiating the purchase of a share of the forest, and arrange for the joint management of their acquisition. Alternatively, governments could purchase it on their behalf, and install the necessary mechanisms to preserve local livelihoods and prevent illegal logging. The first is not happening to any significant degree, mainly because of market failure in the management of public goods. The second is happening in a minor way only, through schemes such as the World Bank's Global Environment Facility, which cost little and achieve little (Clémençon, 2004, 2006). They could achieve more, but only if governments were to make decisions that would be supported by people who value biodiversity highly, and opposed by those who do not. Until such time as the public as a whole is persuaded that the value of biodiversity is high, in economic terms, human terms, ethical terms, or any other terms, the existing democratic process would have to be over-ruled if conservation were to be made any more rigorous than it is. The same applies to climate change, and every other environmental issue of major concern, when other concerns are higher.

Economics has an essential role to play in the public debate on global environmental integrity, but it is less significant than the role of the physical and biological sciences. People in general are more concerned about the fate of New Orleans and its citizens than they are about the economic cost, however that cost might be calculated. It is through their awareness of the physical sciences that they make their judgements of the extent to which climate change contributed to the New Orleans disaster, and the level of risk of further events that would be similar and worse. It is through its understanding of the biological sciences, alongside spiritual beliefs, that the public judges whether genetically modified organisms designed by humans are capable of outcompeting the intricately interconnected outcome of four billion years of evolution. Some members of the public are influenced by calculations which condense all the uncertainties, the complexities, the risks, the human suffering and the spiritual beliefs into a small number of dollars or a large number of dollars, but most are not. Economics can provide considerable help when it puts its ideologies to one side and informs the public of its own science, and it could provide more. As Spangenberg (2005) has argued, it needs to contribute to the development of multi-criteria approaches which fully reflect the scientific uncertainties and the human risks, and which make full allowance for variations in human values between individuals and over time.

The debate on sustainable development has raised public awareness, and public concern has risen with it. Governments have responded, in particular by recognising that a transformation is needed in patterns of consumption and production (United Nations, 1992). This has led to the concept of decoupling, which has been adopted in the European Union's strategy for sustainable development as 'the overall goal of environmental governance and the core strategy to reconcile environmental protection and continued economic growth' (Giljum, Hak, Hinterberger and Kovanda, 2005). Decoupling can in principle make economic growth and environmental protection fully compatible. However, the concept does not resolve the tension between the two. The practical difficulties of implementing it are the same as those of implementing sustainable development.

To be effective, decoupling must be absolute, such that continued economic growth does not increase consumption or pollution. Relative decoupling, which reduces environmental intensity, but not enough to offset the scale effect of rising GDP, will not achieve the desired objective. For global impacts, the decoupling must not only be absolute but inverse, so that consumption and pollution fall, leaving room for developing countries to develop. In Europe, some environmental qualities exhibit relative decoupling, though not all, while the absolute level of many key impacts is still rising (Giljum et al, 2005). The same can be observed in published data for the United States and other countries (Yale, 2006). The decoupling targets that have been set for the European Union are only loosely defined, and do not establish clear goals for absolute impacts (Giljum et al, 2005).

These unambitious goals for decoupling are fully compatible with economic growth. The use of new technologies to improve environmental efficiency often reduces costs, increases competitiveness and accelerates growth, while contributing to relative decoupling. The efficiency gains may have no effect on absolute levels of impact, since a rebound effect caused by lower prices often stimulates a further increase in demand, which cancels out the gains (Cleveland, 2003). A second contribution to relative decoupling can be achieved through international trade. This may allow consumption to continue rising domestically, while the negative environmental consequences occur in other parts of the world (Giljum and Eisenmenger, 2004).

The viability of decoupling as vehicle for sustainable development rests on the assumption that the world as a whole can follow the development path exhibited by high income countries, from agriculture, to manufacturing, to services. Every economy might then become a service economy, whose economic growth would come from the expansion of activities which consume no more than the environment renews, and pollute no more than it absorbs. An economy of this nature might well be feasible, but it would be radically different from any economy yet known. Today's high income service economies do not stand in isolation. They are part of a global economy, in which they trade extensively with non-service economies, whose incomes and per capita consumption are an order of magnitude lower.

Whose Development?

At the beginning of the 1930s depression John Maynard Keynes wrote an antidote to gloom which extolled the virtues of capital accumulation, while warning of its vices. In it he traced the accumulation of Britain's international wealth to 'the treasure which Drake stole from Spain in 1580' (Keynes, 1930). He performed a simple calculation which gave an indication of how Britain's ownership of foreign assets subsequently accumulated, via investment of Drake's bounty in the Levant Company, followed by the use of the profits to found the East India Company, whose earnings were then invested in other parts of the world, to accumulate a hundred thousandfold between 1580 and 1930. The entire period was one of intense foreign direct and indirect investment, in the Middle East and North Africa, in the Indian sub-continent, in Latin America, in sub-Saharan Africa. The investment helped Britain to develop, but not the recipients (Donaldson, 1986).

Contemporary development theory argues that one of the main needs for the development of developing countries is more investment (World Bank, 2004). The principal means recommended for achieving it are the right of establishment in developing countries for industrial and other international companies, and the privatisation and trade liberalisation of financial services, energy supply services, water supply services and other essential services that can be owned or managed by international banks and corporations. The theoretical benefits to developing countries are not always realised in practice. As Stiglitz (2002) has pointed out, the relationships between foreign investment and development are complex, with effects that can be beneficial or adverse, depending on a wide variety of factors. The importance of these factors is widely acknowledged, but not the benefits that accrue to the investing country. Whatever the impacts might be in developing countries, the investment adds to a modern service economy's accumulated ownership of foreign assets, and the income received from them.

Other features of a high income service economy conceal further tensions, which have been inherited from the history of developed countries' own development. It is a history that has been rightly left behind, but one with residual effects that are highly influential.

Britain's investment in the East India Company was not a straightforward commercial transaction. It took place in parallel with the industrial revolution, which provided the superior weapons of the company's private army, facilitated the shipment of slaves from Africa to America to grow cotton, helped to take the cotton to Britain, and enabled textile products to be made in Britain for sale in India, the jewel in the crown of the British Empire. Other European countries established their own trading empires by similar means, followed, less imperially, by the United States.

The past is history, but its legacy defines the circumstances in which the future starts. Many developing countries have now gained the ability to make textile and other products using the same technologies as in Europe and America, with cheaper labour. Western countries are therefore no longer able to export such products to their former markets, nor keep them out of their own markets without abandoning the global trade on which their wealth is based. In response, they have moved out of mass manufacturing and into marketing (Held, McGrew, Goldblatt and Perraton, 1999). By investing heavily in advertising services and distribution services, global brands are created (Klein, 2001), allowing products sourced in low wage countries to be sold globally, at a price that is sufficiently high to pay the marketing costs. In parallel, new technologies are developed, promoted, and protected as intellectual property, whose royalties make a further contribution to the income of an internationally trading service economy.

As with foreign investment, the effects of these activities on the development of developing countries are complex, and may be beneficial or adverse (George and Kirkpatrick, 2004; Katrak and Strange 2004). The benefit to developed countries is clear, and forms a central component of government policy. The European Union's Lisbon strategy commits it to becoming 'the most dynamic and competitive knowledge-based economy in the world' (Commission of the European Communities, 2005, p.3). The official review chaired by former Netherlands Prime Minister Wim Kok states that 'Lisbon is about achieving Europe's vision of what it wants to be and what it wants to keep... competitor countries and regions are moving on as well, threatening Europe's position in the global economic league table'. Of particular concern is China, which 'has begun to compete not only in low but also in high value-added goods,' while 'India's challenge is no less real - notably in the service sector' (European Communities, 2004, p.12).

If contemporary development theory is correct, these concerns are unfounded. European incomes should not fall as a result of developments in India or China. These countries' ability to compete in low value-added goods, then in high value-added goods, and then in even higher value-added services, should not be seen as a threat, but as a welcome sign of developing countries developing, to join those that have already developed. Yet Europe is urged to maintain its position in the global economic league table, as obtained through its industrial and imperial history. If the Lisbon strategy really is necessary for the maintenance of European incomes, neo-liberal theory is suspect. Once again, the classical theory of Adam Smith and David Ricardo would seem to be more relevant. It reveals yet another tension in sustainable development, that is particularly difficult to resolve.

David Ricardo is famed for his law of comparative advantage, which appears to support neo-liberal trade policy, yet explains why elites in many of the most impoverished developing countries choose to export their natural resources rather than attempt the more difficult task of social and economic development (Auty, 2000; Sachs and Warner, 1995). This aspect of Ricardo's theory poses no threat to Europe, but other aspects are more problematic. In particular, his labour theory of value suggests that rising productivity does not result in rising wages. The theory was seized on by Marx in his antagonism to the depth of poverty in industrialising England, but was originally identified by Smith and developed by Ricardo. 'The demand for labour', wrote Smith, 'determines the quantity of the necessaries and conveniences of life which must be given to the labourer; and the money price of labour is determined by what is requisite for purchasing this quantity' (Smith, 1776). Ricardo added extra clarity by arguing that, in any self-contained market economy under equilibrium

conditions, competition for jobs would force the price of labour down to 'that price which is necessary to enable the labourers, one with another, to subsist and to perpetuate their race' (Ricardo, 1821, p.58).

The minimum wage in Europe has risen considerably since Ricardo's time, calling his theory into question. However, the European economy is not self-contained. The classical theory is consistent with neo-classical theory, whose focus on exchange value avoids the need to consider absolute value (Roncaglia, 1981; Sraffa, 1951). This does not affect analyses of the European economy, since the Ricardian trap does not apply to any sub-economy above the bottom of the global income scale. It applies only to the entire international economy of which they are part. Globalisation is changing that economy, towards undoing the separation between high income economies and low income ones. If that were to happen, and if classical economic theory were to apply, the global minimum wage would remain unchanged, and become the same everywhere. There would be no levelling up, nor even a levelling to the middle. There could only be a levelling down. The Lisbon strategy of endeavouring to maintain Europe's position at the top of the global economic league table would be a highly rational response.

A Common Future

Sustainable development is going to be difficult to achieve. Achieving it requires a thorough understanding of the biological, physical, economic, social and political processes involved. Economic theories offer explanations, but not prescriptions, whether they be classical, neo-classical or any other. Economic laws do not have to be obeyed, any more than the law of gravity has to be obeyed. They merely explain what happens when no action is taken to prevent it. In doing so they offer vital clues as to why sustainable development is proving so difficult to implement. They need to be acknowledged, understood and extensively debated, along with another fundamental law with which they interact, and which is equally problematic. No solution has yet been found to the problem of market failure in dealing with global public goods. Hardin (1968) referred to this as the tragedy of the commons.

Hardin's analysis of market failure in the management of public goods has been criticised for implying that private ownership is the only remedy (Aguilera-Klink, 1994). This does not do justice to Hardin's original analysis, in which privatisation was his favoured option, but not always a viable one, and not the only one. 'Consider bank-robbing', he wrote. 'The man who takes money from a bank acts as if the bank were a commons. How do we prevent such action? Certainly not by trying to control his behaviour solely by a verbal appeal to his sense of responsibility'. Instead, laws to prohibit the undesirable action are enacted and enforced. The commons may be converted into public goods that are publicly owned and managed, or in some cases, private goods that are privately owned and managed, but either way, laws which control access are established and enforced on behalf of a public that sees no future in a free-for-all.

The global climate and global biodiversity remain what may be regarded as a free-for-all. Unless a binding consensus can be achieved on preserving them, each individual nation has little option but to join in the race to maximise its own economic performance, irrespective of the impact this might have on the sustainability of the global environment. Views on how this situation might be managed fall into two camps (Vogler, 2000). One side appeals to a sense of responsibility and enlightened co-operation between sovereign states, while the other sees no answer short of enforceable global law.

The market cannot solve the problem. The most it can do is help to implement a public solution, for example through the issue of credits for greenhouse gas emissions. This creates an artificial market, and incentives to reduce emissions in the most cost-effective way, but the size of the effect, and its impact on different people in different countries, depend entirely on government decisions (Ott and Sachs, 2000).

Growing public awareness is a vital factor in preventing a tragedy of the global commons, but it needs to elevate enlightened co-operation to a new plane. The herders in Hardin's illustration refrain from joining forces to manage the degrading land because they all realise that if any one of them chooses not to join in, he or she will have the biggest herd when the crisis arrives, and the greatest chance of being dominant when it is over. No matter how high the level of awareness that the land is overgrazed, and no matter how high the level of concern, concern is even higher for the consequence of failing to compete with an unscrupulous competitor.

Public awareness of the need for sustainable development came to the fore through the Brundtland report (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987), whose title, Our Common Future, encouraged the view that the future of the whole human race is at risk. This is misleading. It hides yet another tension in the concept of sustainable development, which is the biggest of all, and the most difficult to face. Our future is not necessarily common. It can only be common if we choose to make it so.

As well as being the biggest of the tensions, this is also the oldest. It was referred to by the United Nations (2003, p.6) in its 2003 review of the Millennium Development Goals, which noted that 'the implications of the scarcity of a number of natural resources, the mismanagement or depletion of such resources and unequal access to them should also be recognized as potential causes of conflict'. The wording was more guarded than Plato was prepared to use when discussing the same problem over two thousand years earlier. His analysis of the structure of the state began with the observation that 'if we are to have enough for pasture and plough, we shall have to cut off a slice of our neighbours' territory. And if they too are no longer confining themselves to necessities and have embarked on the pursuit of unlimited material possessions, they will want a slice of ours too' (Plato, 360BC, p.107-108). From this cool acceptance of a problem that is a lot older than we tend to think, he inferred that the state must have an army, 'which will go out and fight for its interests and defend its citizens against all comers'. By Plato's analysis, unrestrained economic competition for the environmental commons does not end in their total destruction. It ends in war. Once the winner has secured control, the commons can be managed.

This conclusion is too stark to be accepted easily. It is highly disturbing, with no comfort to be found in the knowledge that major wars rarely take place over increasing pollution or the extinction of wildlife. Climate change and loss of biodiversity can very quickly lead to catastrophic decline in agricultural production, in some areas, but not in others. This would revive the oldest resource conflict of all, on top of those for other resources on which we have become dependent. The immediacy of the implication is much harder to accept than the slowly accumulating prospect of mass extinctions, or even self-extinction. These are easily contemplated, because they are distant, and in the extreme, unimaginable. The more immediate consequence is brutally mundane. And yet, when the Cold War was at its height, much the same problem could be contemplated, and tackled, and for the time being, solved.

Plato regarded warfare as a permanent human condition, driven by competition for access to and control of environmental resources. War was still seen as inevitable two thousand years later, when Clausewitz described it as 'a mere continuation of policy by other means' (von Clausewitz, 1832, p.31). Now, for the first time in human history, the unprecedented breadth of human communication has made it possible to contemplate a common future.

Governing the Commons

Sustainable development is a revolutionary idea. When environmental sources and sinks have become overstretched in the past, states have gone to war over them without a second thought. Now, we hesitate. It still happens, but it is no longer considered to be inevitable.

The world has come a long way since Plato's time. The changes have made age-old problems more readily soluble, and at the same time, more pressing. City states have coalesced into nation states, and now into the ethno-cultural-continental alliances that Samuel Huntington called civilisations (Huntington, 1993). If the word globalisation means what it says, the final step is already under way. If it is ever completed, the global commons will be manageable, but it is a very big step. If it reaches a conclusion through war it will be a very big war, or a series of such wars, with incalculable effects on the natural environment as well as people. However, the peaceable alternative requires a revolution in human thinking.

That revolution has begun, in the emerging concept of global governance (von Braunmühl and von Winterfeld, 2005). This is another phrase whose meaning is unclear, except that it does not mean global government. There are many reasons for this (McGrew, 2000), of which the most obvious, again, is rarely stated. Democratic institutions rest on the ability to appoint or remove a government through multi-party elections in which every adult has one vote, each with equal weight. Desire to see the whole world governed in a such way is no greater in high income countries now than it was among the French aristocracy before its overthrow in the revolution that brought modern democracy to Europe. It is to be hoped that globally democratic governance can be introduced through a revolution in thought rather than one of violence, which might well be as fruitless as it would be destructive. However, it cannot happen unless there is a widespread desire for it to happen.

The need to go beyond global governance to globally democratic government has been argued from several complementary directions. From the socio-economic perspective, Stiglitz (2002, p.21) has suggested that 'unfortunately, we have no world government, accountable to the people of every country, to oversee the globalization process in a fashion comparable to the way national governments guided the nationalization process'. From the environmental perspective, the argument derives from the observation that the commons cannot be managed without the rule of law, and laws cannot be enacted and enforced without government. From the perspective of the technologically escalating weaponry of international conflict, Bertrand Russell came to the conclusion that scientific society can only be stable on condition of 'a single government of the whole world, possessing a monopoly of armed force and therefore able to enforce peace' (Russell, 1949, p.127). Hardin disagreed, and interpreted some of Russell's writing differently (Hardin, 1993), but Harold Macmillan was in full accord. As Britain's Minister of Defence, before becoming Prime Minister, he advised Parliament to pursue a 'supranational authority invested with real power. Honourable Members may say that this is elevating the United Nations, or whatever may be the authority, into something like world government; be it so, it is none the worse for that. In the long run this is the only way out for mankind' (Macmillan, 1955, p.11).

What Macmillan saw as the long run came closer to the short run when the Stockholm conference recognised that unsustainable development had become global. Agenda 21 described the compressed timescale in its opening words, 'humanity stands at a defining moment in history' (United Nations, 1992). The moment may not last much longer. While many of the smaller developing countries have found it extremely difficult to develop, China's growth has outpaced that of high income countries by over 5% a year for several decades (World Bank, 2004). If the pace continues until per capita incomes have caught up, China's economy will overtake America's in or around the year 2035, with another factor of four to go. Alongside the potential pressures on natural resources and the global environment, this has obvious consequences for US hegemony.

In predicting a clash of civilisations, Huntington advised western governments that their policy 'should be divided between short-term advantage and long-term accommodation'. It is a high risk strategy. If western civilisation fails to achieve its goals by persuasion, no accommodation will be possible. The division of interests will have been strengthened instead of eased, to magnify the forces that will be unleashed when the clash is finally resolved. Even so, it is a rational strategy, unless beliefs change radically.

In aggregate, each of Huntington's civilisations believes in the superiority of its own cultures. Each believes that its cultures have progressed beyond all others, that the world cannot unite until the others have progressed towards its own, and that any movement towards theirs would be regressive. If these beliefs are valid, it is rational for each of these civilisational entities to defend its cultures to the hilt, if necessary through war.

Equally fundamentally, the possibility of a common future is still highly tentative, along with the possibility that there might ever be an end to war. Hardin dismissed the idea of world government with the view that 'the external enemies required to sustain global cooperation are, by definition, lacking in a united world' (Hardin, 1993, p.277). It is rarely suggested that the only barrier to the United States resuming its civil war is the existence of a hostile world, but Hardin's view is widely held. If warfare is indeed a permanent human condition, there is little to be gained from shying away from it now. Huntington's strategy would then be the most appropriate, to maximise the short-term advantage that is necessary to win the war when it comes.

Economic interests dictate the same strategy. Although neo-liberal ideas ostensibly reject the Smith-Ricardo labour theory of value as an aberration espoused by Marx, it still rides high in the rationale of the Lisbon strategy and its American equivalent. It is just as high in the minds of western electorates, who fear that an accommodation with China would result in their wages falling to the level of the Chinese workers to whom their jobs are being lost.

With all these beliefs stacked up against it, sustainable development is a precarious concept. Nonetheless, there is reason to believe in it, to be found by looking beyond the mechanisms of globalisation to its likely outcome.

The United State

In visualising a world without war, Immanuel Kant rejected the idea of a democratically elected world government, and proposed instead a federation of free states. He was sceptical about democracy for any state, with a view that majority rule could never represent the whole

people (Russell, 1961, p.684). Aristotle and other ancient critics were even more sceptical, believing that the conventional democratic process would inevitably degenerate into a tyranny of oratory (Burnheim, 1985, p.3). For the state to be governed in the interest of the people as a whole, Kant preferred a monarchic republic, while his federation of such republics would abolish war by adopting a covenant forbidding it. The federation would require a minimal level of global law, to secure the covenant, but it was not envisaged that it would integrate to the extent of creating a single global economy.

Economic globalisation has already taken global integration well beyond what Kant proposed, to necessitate more extensive laws, and similarly extended means of law enforcement. With or without a democratic process, economic integration pushes Kant's global federation towards having to adopt the full legal framework of a global state.

Bull (2000, p.466) has considered how adaptations of various past and present forms of government might take effect in a globalised world, and identified the distinct possibility that some other alternative might emerge, which 'does not conform to any previous pattern of universal political organisation'. It may be inferred from Plato's analysis that this is by far the most likely outcome.

Plato's utopian vision of what he hoped the state might be never materialised, but his description of what it actually is has proved remarkably resilient, through every form of government that has ever been established, whether egalitarian or oppressive. He explained why this is so, in the need for the state to have an army, with straightforward consequences. For the army to be effective it had to be directed, by 'the Guardians who are to be given authority as Rulers'. Under the Rulers there had to be Auxiliaries, 'their function being to assist the Rulers in the execution of their decisions' (Plato, 360BC, p.159). In a modern democracy the rulers are elected by popular vote, but they still rule. They still have auxiliary elites to help them do it. They still exist for the same reason, as Plato explained, to enable the state to defend and promote its interests against those of other states. When there are no other states, everything changes.

It is difficult to appreciate the enormity of what globalisation means. In some ways, the world which emerges may be quite similar to the one we know. If it is to be subject to the rule of law there must be a law-making body, a court of justice and a police force, all of them global, but identical in function to those of any state now. There may be several layers of government through which many separate identities govern themselves, with each layer subordinate to those above it through the principle of subsidiarity, as is approximately the case now in the United States of America and the United Kingdom of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Yet in many other ways the global state must be radically different from any state yet known. Its fully integrated global economy will have no other economy competing against it. Among many other redundant determinants of social structure, there will be no further need for economic behaviour to be organised around a recognition that 'in modern war the great expense of firearms gives an evident advantage to the nation which can best afford that expense' (Smith 1776). With no other state competing against it, economically or militarily, the economic systems and social structures of a global state must be determined by factors that are completely different from those described by Plato. There may be rulers, as now, there may be elites, as now, and there may be abject poverty, as now, in every country or only some, as now, but there may not be. We simply do not know, because nothing remotely like it has ever existed.

This has crucial implications for the decisions that are being made now. In the world that emerges from globalisation, every aspect of culture that is influenced by the socio-economic structures of the state must be radically different from the cultures that we are familiar with, whether they be western cultures, Confucian cultures, Islamic cultures, or any of the cultures that have evolved in many thousands of years of competition between separate sovereign states. This may have little influence on the spiritual aspects of those cultures, which still have to learn to live with each other, but the socio-economic aspects must evolve into a new set of cultures that is radically different from them all. Classical economic theory, neo-classical economic theory, Marxist-Leninist economic theory, and every other economic theory that has ever been devised, will all have become nothing more than explanations of how people behaved in the past, in entirely different circumstances.

This offers considerable hope for sustainable development. There is nothing to be gained from defending to the death a culture or an economic system that is going to disappear anyway. If there really is no fundamental difference between the races that comprise our single race, it becomes irrelevant which ethno-cultural group is the one to develop the cultures and economic systems of a globalised world, or preferably, all of them in concert. Whether we choose to compete to the end for which group wins, or set about the task of uniting now, the only difference it will make to the end result is the quality of the environment that survives, and the ancestry of the people who survive.

In helping to make sustainable development a practical reality, every discipline of the social sciences has an immense role to play that has hardly been started. The biggest roles will inevitably be played by thinkers and policy-makers in the USA and China, today's global hegemon and its most likely successor, or perhaps, until the need has passed, a mutually self-interested alliance of both. We are all involved however, and we are flying blind. We are constructing a global economy, without the remotest idea of what a global economy will be like. We are constructing a global polity, with no idea of what that will be like either. To avert the disasters feared at Stockholm, sustainable development needs a clearer vision of what it is developing.

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