

*Paper for the 6<sup>th</sup> biennial CANSEE (Canadian Society for Ecological Economics) Conference, October 27-29, 2005, York University, Toronto, Canada.*

## **TRANSFORMATION IN THINKING: VALUES FOUNDATION FOR “SUSTAINABLE “ ECONOMICS**

### **ABSTRACT**

This paper is focused on the search for commonly held universal values, which underpin all sustainable human activities.

It now appears possible to find commonality on a number of important deeply held universal values, which span all spheres of society, including different cultures, countries, professions and disciplines, including Ecological Economics. On these universal values all sustainability seems to depend. In addition, one finds another layer or level of values, which are linked to our diversity of cultures, disciplines and countries.

This paper emphasizes, that in order to find new viable or sustainable paths to address the present breakdown in our overall system, (and EE is a part) we have to find some basic values, which we all hold in common. Otherwise we continue to swim at the usually culture based “diversity” level, even though diversity in itself is an extremely important part of the process. However we need some firm foundation of universal values on which “diversity” can be seated.

To access fully these deeply held universal values it appears will require the development of our unconscious mind where our higher consciousness is located, and have its vast wisdom and knowledge balanced with that of our conscious objective mind. Visionaries tell us that this is a key to fully understanding the meaning of sustainability.

This search for these deeply rooted universal values is the essential challenge that this paper tries to address.

### **Introduction**

According to many international visionaries, we are presently going through the most dramatic transformation in human thinking in 300 years, that is, since the scientific/industrial revolutions.

It appears that our old “system” and ways of thinking about human activities is breaking down. This is evident in areas with which we are all familiar, and many now fear we are in a position of seriously jeopardizing the ability of the earth to regenerate itself. However we somehow do not seem to fully comprehend that to change this situation will require a major change in human thinking at a very deep level in order to genuinely redirect our activities towards positive outcomes. It would appear insufficient to only think in terms of changing policies and actions, which has been our major focus to date in most areas. But the thought of changing the principles and values, which underpin our

policies, seems to be the level which several visionaries have in mind when they refer to “changing our way of thinking”.

Let us look at some profound statements made by highly respected international visionaries:

WILLIS HARMAN : <sup>i</sup>

“The industrialized world, having lost any consensus on ultimate meanings and values, steers itself mainly by economic and financial signal serving pseudo-values ..... The macro-problem has its origins in basic assumptions (values) related to scientific based reality. Since science does not give credibility to inner experience, transcendent values have no power and materialistic values prevail”.

“ The Western neglect of the realm of subjective (higher consciousness) experience has had serious consequences in our confusion over values. For it is ultimately in this realm of the subjective, transcendent, and the spiritual that all societies have found the basis for their deepest values, commitments and sense of meaning”.

ERVIN LASZLO : <sup>i</sup>

“ Our globalized technological civilization could break down in chaos and anarchy—or it could break through to a more humane human and sustainable world. The choice between these possibilities will not be made by applying technological fixes or implementing strategies based on the same kind of thinking that created today’s uncertainties ..... to master our destiny we need new thinking, new values –a new consciousness”.

ALBERT EINSTEIN :<sup>ii</sup>

“No problem can be solved from the same consciousness that created it. We have to learn to see the world anew”.

“ The ideals which have lighted my way, and time after time have given me new courage to face life cheerfully, have been Kindness, Beauty and Truth. The trite subjects of human efforts, possessions, outward success, luxury, have always seemed to me contemptible”.

What do these visionaries mean by new consciousness and changing our way of thinking or viewing the world?

As our “way of thinking” is based on the values on which our thinking is seated, this must mean that these visionaries are questioning the very values, which we have mostly held as basic to our beliefs about work and life in its broadest sense.

This change then involves something very much deeper and more difficult than we had imagined. This really means that we are the central part of the problem!

In organizations and governments, this dilemma often manifests itself in a type of blockage or gap between what decision makers sometimes say and what they do ---a sort of mismatch between perhaps sustainable appearing policies and actual implementation. We have all experienced this in many different organizations, including universities.

What seems to be happening is that the principles or values which underpin the well marketed and often “sustainable sounding” policies are controlled by a set of values which are translated into actions which are not in keeping with what the policies supposedly are meant to produce.

What has happened?

Many visionaries have come to the conclusion that the dilemma lies in the real values which underpin even sustainable sounding policies, and the values which exist need to change in order for the implementation process to produce a positive outcome.

How can this be achieved? It appears that in order to treat this blockage we will need to look deeper ---that is, examine the actual principles and values, which underpin the policies.

Here, it appears lies much of the dilemma. To examine these principles and values means literally questioning our own personal values, as we have all been brought up believing in certain truths or principles which apparently no longer work. Hence visionaries in the field are indeed calling this a major human upheaval in terms of what we hold dear in our beliefs about the realities about work and life. This major upheaval Ervin Laszlo refers to as a “Macroshift”.<sup>iii</sup>

Now we need to go the next step and try to make sense of what these values really are. This process has already begun in many areas, and we are finding a whole range of values or beliefs, which vary with different cultures, different disciplines and professions and social groups, just as we see here today. This diversity enriches us, but how do we make sense of this in terms of coming to some kind of agreement as to what constitutes some commonly held sustainable values?

Specialists in the field, such as Roger Walsh,<sup>iv</sup> tell us that we actually have more than one source of human knowledge and wisdom ---different areas of the mind so to speak related to both our conscious and unconscious thinking. For simplicity some scholars refer to this concept as left brain and right brain thinking. Apparently here in Western society we are all endowed with an exceptionally well developed conscious mind ----the one we use every day, and our seat of objectivity and logic. We also have an unconscious mind, which apparently contains an immense store of knowledge and wisdom far surpassing the conscious mind. In the unconscious mind we find our source of deep feelings, intuition, our sense of fulfillment and inner peace, and very importantly, a vast deep Centre or Source where a higher consciousness or spirituality, and wisdom in its broadest sense are located. This unconscious mind apparently also feeds wisdom to our conscious minds without us knowing it. As well apparently, the root of many very deeply held human values are found here.

Thus the importance of understanding something about how we think cannot be overestimated, as it helps us to discover the depth of our minds where we may be able to draw out some positive values which are common to all humans, spanning all cultures and disciplines.

For some readers this may seem a very strange approach for us who are accustomed to thinking that the conscious objective mind is the only one to rely on, and the unconscious mind is some sort of personal thing which maybe plays tricks on us once in a while, but cannot be relied on in a practical world.....True, we can do much good in terms of the many initiatives in which most of us here are involved in, but if we hope to genuinely make the transition from sustainable sounding policy to sustainable practice, there is going to have to be a change in the values which underpin most of our present policies in most organizations, including universities. Therefore, this means that the decision makers, as well as each one of us, will need to change some values, as all decisions are deeply governed by the personal values we hold. In the same way, the values of decision makers in all organizations, governments and universities influence directly the interpretation of their organizational values.

This seems a monumental task. It is no wonder that visionaries are warning us of the magnitude of this transformation. Then we may also think, what does this do to me ---I have to work in the “real world” where the principles and values are still the conventional ones, but inside I am someone else who has other values. This is very true, and of course there is no easy answer.....I can suggest however, that there are some people I know, that in fact live 2 lives, ----one life at work today, because we need to make a living. The other life in one we have inside, and are constantly aware of as the one we have in front of us as our future, and are constantly planning how we can slowly move towards our new fulfilling goals. As time goes on, this will become less difficult, as more opportunities will become available where the transformed values are taking hold, and sustainability principles will be combined with more laws enacted to ensure the direction we are going.

## **CHANGING VALUES**

We now need to take a new step.

We firstly need to identify the present day conventional principles and values. These then need to be examined to identify which ones are producing positive outcomes (sustainable ones) and which are resulting in negative (unsustainable) outcomes. These are the ones, which need to be transformed.

This process has already begun in some areas, and we are finding a whole range of beliefs or values, which vary with different cultures and countries, different disciplines and professions, different social groups, amongst others ---just as we see here today. This diversity we honour, but how do we make sense of this in terms of coming to any kind of agreement or common ground on a set of values, which are considered sustainable by everyone?

This search for common values and principles is an extremely complex area, and one that has been creating extensive controversy. Many visionaries and international organizations have been involved in the process. One important project has produced the document referred to as the United Nations Earth Charter.<sup>v</sup> This is a document that represents many years of study and participation by international thinkers. They have finally come to an agreement on a number of commonly held universal values, which are accepted by all cultures and countries. At the same time they also emphasize the importance of respecting diversity in many values that have a cultural or regional emphasis. Therefore it appears that we as humans have certain deeply held values and principles which we all have in common, and as well, have an additional number of values and principles which are suited to our particular culture or region or discipline. These two sets of values can thus apparently live side by side in harmony with each other. The sustainable values that form the basis of this study involve these deeply rooted universal values, which are common to all.

The identification and description of specific universal values involves an extensive discussion, and beyond the limitations of this paper. However, a person who has embraced these values has a unique way of thinking, which demonstrates the values on which this thinking is seated. Therefore, in order to identify some distinct differences in the way of thinking between someone who embraces a conventional way of thinking (with conventional values), and someone who has embraced some emerging universal values, two different "composite" persons are described. These composite persons represent a brief comparison between these two ways of thinking and the values which underpin their thinking.

### **COMPOSITE PERSON : CONVENTIONAL THINKER**

A person with conventional thinking believes that our objective mind and rational intellectual thinking is paramount in life and work, and the rational mind is capable of eventually solving all the problems and mysteries in our world. As a result of this belief, there is no credibility or place provided for higher human consciousness and its special potential for subjective knowing. This also leaves the concept of intuition, inner fulfillment and meaning in life as irrelevant or non-existent, as all meaning is seated totally in the rational objective mind. Hence the concept of happiness in life and work depends on acquiring "things" and consumption in its full spectrum. The motivation to work is to earn money and buy things. This in turn provides status, power, control and happiness. The expression, "money talks" is appropriate, as everything considered worthwhile in life can supposedly be bought at a price. Therefore happiness and success is interpreted in economic terms. Accompanying this concept of success, life naturally involves pride in one's capacity to earn money and to show this through owning things and through associations with others who have done the same.

As a result, it is assumed that humans are by nature competitive, greedy and jealous of others who have more than themselves or have things they would like to have. Money has proven a good motivator. In addition, with this thinking, there is always the pressure to "get there first", no matter what may be the consequences for others. It is felt that strong individualism is a natural and valuable trait that makes it possible for competition and personal success to work well. It is believed that we are completely "architects of our

own success and lives", so competitiveness is essential in everything, bringing with it such qualities as jealousy and greed. However they are considered natural motivators for working hard and "getting ahead". On the other hand, when we feel threatened in our ability to succeed in the competitive world of winners and losers (because if I win someone else naturally loses), we may also feel anger and sometimes fear ---even fear of failure.

The conventional thinker views nature as completely separate and unrelated to humans. This means that nature is seen as part of a big machine (Earth), with predicable laws (which can eventually be fully understood through scientific objective reductionist thinking) , and have a logical predictable makeup which humans have the capacity to understand , control and manipulate as we wish. This means that nature can eventually come completely under the control of humans, as we come to understand and dominate its secrets, so it can work in such a way which is compatible with human made technologies and systems that satisfy the aspirations of a society with economic related values.

This means that the concept of greed, and always aspiring to more wealth and power can be satisfied , as there is no limit to economic growth, once humans fully understand and control the mechanisms of nature. Also, having things and doing things that represent monetary success is considered admirable in society, and people possessing them are considered role models for others to follow.

## **COMPOSITE PERSON: SUSTAINABLE THINKER**

A person with sustainable thinking (values) believes that we need to have a careful balance between our objective logical thinking and our higher consciousness . This means that the concepts of inner fulfillment and meaning, intuition and spirituality are real, and play an essential role in a happy life.

Hence the concept of happiness in work and life depend on a careful balance between conscious objective thinking and unconscious higher consciousness. The motivation to work involves both inner fulfillment, in addition to basic everyday efforts to do a good job. However, this also means working at something we find satisfying and worthwhile , involving sometimes difficult to describe feelings (and values) which are affected by our higher consciousness.

This balance, which some scholars have referred to simply as left brain/right brain thinking, also appears essential for our deep sense of meaning in life, our desire to cooperate, our self respect, our compassion and sense of self discipline and taking responsibility for the consequences of our actions. This also includes a high level of tolerance and humility, a quality often viewed as a weakness in a conventional thinker, and where conceit is often considered more acceptable. In its place we often see conceit. These values lead to an open mind and key to continuous learning, and being able to contribute meaningfully, as well as successful economically to long term viable work goals.

A sustainable thinker is cooperative, rather than competitive, non-violent and has compassion for others. The choice is to live a basic comfortable life, where emphasis is on needs rather than wants. Quality of life takes precedence over quantity in life, and the

concept of “survival of the fittest” (Loye),<sup>vi</sup> or “getting there first” , or conceit in knowledge or status , have no worthwhile meaning or place in a happy life.

A person with sustainable thinking views humans as part of Nature and Earth systems. This person believes that humans have only a limited capacity to understand the complexity and beauty of Nature and the Cosmos, and accepts that there exists some indescribable Force or Power beyond our comprehension. The development of our higher consciousness helps the person to gain deeper insights, and wisdom related to the indescribable aspects of Nature and the Cosmos, and provides humans with the possibility of accepting and being at peace with the idea of our “smallness”.

A sustainable thinker believes that Nature is considered beyond human understanding and control, and we must learn to respect Nature, and live within its capacity to regenerate itself.

This places a person’s life and work in a new reality. Our human activities are non-violent and controlled by the needs of Nature, and human input is based on universal values, which provide the basis for long-term viability.

A person who is a genuine sustainable thinker, views work and life through a different lens, where greed changes to sharing, competition changes to cooperation, and focus is on quality in products and services. Priority is placed on who we are (our values), rather than what we own, or control. This does not mean that this composite person is weak and easily manipulated. On the contrary, this person is self assured, proactive, compassionate and clearly focused on long term sustainable actions in both work and life.

In these composite profiles we are contrasting two different ways of thinking, that is, two sets of values. We will probably find ourselves at a personal level identifying with some aspects of each. This is positive, as it is meant as food for thought, as we each wade through a whole series of questions trying to make sense of our own particular circumstances.

Here lies our very personal challenge ---our personal search for our deeply held common values. As we know, this is the place where everything begins, and together, we can feel optimism with the incredible potential of the human mind becomes apparent.

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<sup>1</sup> Harman, Willis, 1998, “Global Mind Change”.

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<sup>2</sup> Laszlo, Ervin, 2001, “Macroshift”.

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<sup>3</sup> Einstein, Albert, “The Expanded Quotable Einstein”, Alice Caprise, Ed., Princeton University Press.

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<sup>4</sup> Laszlo, Ervin, 2001, “Macroshift.

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<sup>5</sup> Walsh, Roger, 2001 , “ The Seven Practices of Essential Spirituality”, Noetic Sciences Review, Dec, 2001.

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<sup>6</sup> The Earth Charter, 1997, United Nations Earth Charter Commission , Earth Council, San Jose, Costa Rica.

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<sup>7</sup> Loye, David, 2002, “The Great Adventure: Towards a fully Human Theory of Evolution”, SUNY Press.