

OUR FUTURE

A READING List

Introduction

What we pass on

The key 100 books

About the author

Other reading

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We . . . must avoid the impulse to live only for today, plundering for our own ease and convenience the precious resources of tomorrow. We cannot mortgage the material assets of our grandchildren without risking the loss also of their political and spiritual heritage. We want democracy to survive for all generations to come, not to become the insolvent phantom of tomorrow.

Dwight Eisenhower 1960

Historians like Arthur Schlesinger and theorists like Albert Hirschman have recorded that every thirty years or so, society shifts - essentially, from the public to the private and back again. The grass, after a while, always feels greener on the other side. The late 1940s to the late 1970s was a period of the public, the late '70s to now, the private. Now the conditions are right for another turn, to a new common life and the security and freedom it affords, but only if we make it happen by tackling a market that is too free and a state that is too remote

Compass Think Tank 2011

This too will pass.....taking the long view

Decade	Themes of intellectual discussion	Key names
1930s	The managerial revolution End of capitalism	J Burnham J Strachey
1940s	Keynesianism Meritocracy New world order	JM Keynes Michael Young R Niebuhr, EH Carr
1950s	End of ideology Revisionism Private affluence/public squalour	D. Bell A. Shonfield; Tony Crosland JK Galbraith
1960s	Corporate planning, management Modernisation of society Participation critique of professionals	R Ackoff, Peter Drucker Peter Berger C Pateman; Ivan Illich
1970s	Costs of economic growth Public choice theory Small is beautiful Change Corporatism feminism	EJ Mishan J Buchanan E. Schumacher; L. Kohr S. Beer; A. Toffler; D. Schon A Cawson Betty Friedan
1980s	Deindustrialisation Privatisation Pursuit of excellence ecology decentralisation globalisation	Blackaby; Dyson Consultancies; World Bank Tom Peters James Lovelock OECD J Stiglitz, Martin Wolf
1990s	End of history Flexibility and reengineering Reinvention of government; NPM Climate change The learning organisation Washington consensus	F Fukayama M Hammer D Osborne, OECD Scientific community P Senge World Bank
2000s	Good governance Neo-liberalism and its limits Environmental collapse Migration and social integration	World bank; OECD David Harvey Scientific community C Cauldwell
2010s	Migration financial capitalism austerity Inequality populism	Everyone J Stiglitz M Blyth D Dorling. Wilkinson, T Pikety
Present	migration The commons Post-capitalism Populism	P2P P Mason Werner-Mueller

Source; RG Young

Introduction – taster for [Dispatches to the post-capitalist generation](#)

The book of which is a taster has been almost 20 years in its making....since I found myself approaching my 60th birthday and exploring 2 questions-

- where people of my age - disgusted with the behaviour of our corporate and political elites - should best focus their energies and resources to help nudge the systems of which we are part to a more hopeful future?
- And who were the people we could support in that venture?

The initial results of that exploration were reflected in a short paper - draft Guide for the Perplexed - produced in 2000 before the global economic crisis began to unravel the post-war world - with additional sections added in the years which have followed.

Basically that essay looked at some key books; passed a bleak judgement on the impact various activists had made on global issues during the past decade.....and failed to give any answer to the first question.....

In 2010 or so I rephrased the questions and included a few more key book references -

Any convincing argument for systemic reform need to tackle four questions -

- Why do we need major change in our systems?
- Who or what is the culprit?
- What programme might start a significant change process?
- What mechanisms (process or institutions) do we need to implement such programmes?

Most books in this field focus more on the first two questions - and are much lighter on the last two questions. The first two questions require pretty demanding analytical skills - of an interdisciplinary sort which the very structure of universities actively discourages. Hence the limited choice of authors - perhaps the two best known being Immanuel Wallerstein and Manuel Castells. Both offer complex systemic views but the writing style is not very accessible. Susan Strange made a great contribution to our practical understanding of Casino Capitalism as she called it.

Sadly, two other well-known names with a much more accessible writing style - Noam Chomsky and Naomi Klein - tend to focus a lot of their energy on rogue states such as the USA.

Will Hutton's The World We're In (2002) was as powerful and accessible of the limitations of the Anglo-saxon model as you will ever read - and, with his stakeholder concept, carried with it a more optimistic view of the possibilities of reform. He has the wide inter-disciplinary reading necessary for anyone to have anything useful to say to us about how we might edge societies away from the abyss we all seem to be heading toward.

I've used the verb "edge" because the calls for revolution which come from the old leftists are unrealistic (if not self-indulgent) but mainly because, historically, significant change has rarely come from deliberate social interventions. It has come from a more chaotic process.

More and more disciplines are applying chaos theory in recognition of this - even management (less a discipline than a parasite!) So the call these days is for paradigm shift to help us in the direction of the systemic change the world needs to make in its move away from neo-liberalism.

David Korten's various books offer good analysis - although his focus on the American corporation does not easily carry to Europe (See William Davies' recent Reinventing the Firm for a recent attempt).

Most commentary on the recent global financial crisis has identified banks as the culprit - and those governments who made the move in recent decades to free banks from the regulation to which they have been subject. Marxists such as David Harvey have reminded us that government and banking behaviour is simply a reflection of a deeper issue - of surplus capital.

A few years later I try to identify the narrative that I had been using to make sense of the world in the following way -

- The "mixed economy" which existed from 1950-1980 was a healthy and effective system for us in the West.
- It worked because power was diffused. Each type of power - economic (companies/banks etc), political (citizens and workers) and legal/admin/military (the state) - balanced the other. None was dominant.
- Economic globalisation has, however, now undermined the power which working class people were able to exercise in that period through votes and unions
- Privatisation is a disaster - inflicting costs on the public and transferring wealth to the few
- Neo-liberalism has supplied a thought system which justifies corporate greed and the privileging (through tax breaks and favourable legislation) of the large international company
- All political parties and most media have been captured by that thought system which now rules the world
- People have, as a result, become cynical and apathetic
- Two elements of the "balanced system" (Political and legal power) are therefore now supine before the third (corporate and media power). The balance is broken and the dominant power ruthless in its exploitation of its new freedom
- It is very difficult to see a "countervailing power" which would make these corporate elites pull back from the disasters they are inflicting on us
- Social protest is marginalised
- Not least by the combination of the media and an Orwellian "security state" ready to act against "dissidence"
- But the beliefs which lie at the dark heart of the neo-liberal project do need more detailed exposure
- as well as its continued efforts to undermine what little is left of state power
- We need to be willing to express more vehemently the arguments against privatisation - existing and proposed)
- to feel less ashamed about arguing for "the commons" and for things like cooperatives and social enterprise (inasmuch as such endeavours are allowed)

But recently I realised that one possible reason for the failure to make any progress with my 2000 essay is because a tension (if not contradiction) exists between the "rationality" model with which I was imbued by my education and other prisms which have been attracting me in my effort to make sense of the world (note even in 2010 the reference to chaos theory).

When I use the word "prism" I am referring to the very specific "world views" of liberals, conservatives and socialists operate from which it is almost impossible for them to be dislodged -

Amatai Etzioni had spelled this out first for me in the early 1970s in his "Social Problems!

But it was Chris Pollitt's small book, "State of the State" (2000) which brought me up against the power of Mary Douglas' "Grid-group" theory - whose basic structure is presented in four quadrants

The egalitarian paradigm:

This sees benign change as being driven bottom up through collective action by those who are united by shared values and status. The idealism of egalitarians (emphasising the possibility of equality and the power of shared values) tends to lead them to feel that nature (including human nature) is vulnerable and has been corrupted.

The hierarchist paradigm

This sees benign change relying on leadership, authority, expertise and rules. As long as these things are in place then the potentially dangerous cycles and vagaries of nature can be managed. Hierarchists see the other paradigms as naïve and unbalanced, but may accept each has its place as long as the hierarchy allots and regulates those places.

The individualist paradigm

This sees benign change as the result of individual initiative and competition. The aggregate sum of individual actions is collective good.

The fatalist paradigm

This sees successful change as unlikely and, in as much as it is possible, random in its causes and consequences. The world is unpredictable and unmanageable.

But it was, as the first part of this book explains. Mike Hulme's book - Why We Disagree about Climate Change - understanding controversy, inaction and opportunity - which finally released me from my two-dimensional view of reality and which made me aware of the poverty of so much thinking and writing about the global crisis.....

Most analysts and radicals take a "mechanical" view of the world (Gareth Morgan's Images of Organisation is still the best read on the metaphors we use) - they assume, that is, that societies and systems can and should be diagnosed and "fixed". Political parties have operated on this pre(o)mise for most of the past century.

But for more than a couple of decades, a lot of serious thinkers (mainly management writers and scientists) have been questioning the simplistic nature of social interventions driven by this principle - pointing to the lessons from chaos science and systems theory.....although economists and social scientists have stuck with the old paradigms.....

It took a few months for this disjuncture to sink in and it was only when I was doing an end-of-year review of blog posts that I noticed several recurring themes which cried out for further development

- Lack of trust and belief - we no longer trust the politicians and have lost the belief in the capacity of the government machinery (that word again!) to succeed in its socio-economic tinkering
- The corruption of the political class
- academic specialization.....

The two questions I had in 2001 were being reformulated as -

- *How do we go about re-establishing some sort of balance of power?*
- *How can social forces be strengthened; and political and state systems of power reformed - so that the wings of corporate power can be properly clipped??*

But I now realize that people like me need to make a more profound break from the metaphors which have ensnared us into simplistic ways of thinking about the various global crises with which we now seem beset.....

Let me therefore state as clearly as I can the distinctive nature of this book -

Books on this subject are written by "specialists" - people who have immersed themselves in academia in one of the many sub-disciplines of the social sciences. It is an interesting fact about the social sciences (and, more recently, also the humanities) that its practitioners tend to belong to particular "schools" who rarely speak to one another.....let alone anyone from other disciplines..... And writers are under pressure to prove that they have something distinctive and persuasive to say

This book comes from a (well-read) non-specialist who has been under no such pressures. It's based on the thinking and reading of a lifetime - but particularly of the last decade when I have had more time to read and reflect

It's structured not on chapters but on the posts on the blog I've been writing since late 2009 - from which I've selected those which were worrying away at this issue (however defined), shuffled them around and reread them more closely

As a result, I'm aware of their tensions and contradictions.....indeed I've constructed some tables to make all this more evident to the reader!

The World We Pass on

I love what I imagine was the Victorian habit of giving sub-titles to their book chapters which offered explanations of what the reader might reasonably expect to find in them. And I've discovered that they are a good discipline for anyone trying to edit his own text.....

In which -

- An indictment is read
- Some important questions are posed
- Different ways of looking at the world are sketched out
- Some explanations are offered for our discord
- The scale of moral collapse and greed is exposed
- A staircase tale about the devil is recounted
- It is suggested that Management and Economics have become the new religion
- A letter to the Younger Generation is discovered
- History is revenged
- Things rise and fall
- "the people" are summonsed

Commentary

Post Title	Tags	Bottom line?
The Indictment	Seeking the common ground	How I saw the world in 2014
Stories we tell	Frame analysis, tropes, memes,	Different ways we try to make sense of the world
Why we disagree	Wicked problems	Pity no one has yet applied frame analysis to the global economic crisis
The scale of our moral collapse	Corporations, politicians, greed, lying, growth, spying, inequality	Has human nature changed?
A Staircase Tale about the devil	Corruption, accountability	A famous Bulgarian parable
The new religion	Management, economics, faith	Strange how few people are prepared to puncture the belief system of the economists and managerialists
A letter to the younger generation	Hope, mutual support, organisation	Sound dying words
The revenge of history?	Spengler, Toynbee	Explain the significance of the table used as a frontispiece
The rise and fall	History, Cyclical, linear	"This too will pass"
We, the People	Populism, fascism	Beware those who talk of "the people"

The Indictment

2008 was supposed to bring us to our senses - to give us the sort of focus we last saw in the immediate post-war years when

- social, political and commercial energies were building a better world;
- greed and flashiness were kept in check; and
- "government" was an institution for whose efforts and results we had some respect if not pride.

A decade on from the most recent global crisis, such hopes and expectations are in tatters... the façade of democracy has been ruthlessly exposed by the latest debt crisis in Europe... and governments seem hell-bent on creating a dystopia of privatized public facilities, repression and gross inequalities which put JK Galbraith's indictment 60 years ago of "private affluence and public squalour" in the shade.



A world of gated communities exists cheek by jowl with those inhabited by crushed spirits of millions evicted from the formal economy or in fear of that fate; politicians, politics and the media are despised as lapdogs of what an American President in 1960 presciently labelled the "military-industrial complex". Welcome to post-modernity!

I believe in the importance of what the academics have taken to calling "agency" - that is, of people coming together to try to improve socio-economic conditions. Such efforts used to be national but now tend to be a combination of local, continental and global.

Some of the effort is driven by anger; some by more creative urges - but hundreds of thousands if not millions of people are involved in activities which have been charted by writers such as Paul Kingsnorth and Paul Hawkin. They include a lot of social enterprise and cooperatives of which the oldest and most inspiring is Mondragon whose various ventures now employ more than 25,000 people in a mountain area of Spain.

But all this does not seem able to inspire a common vision - let alone a coherent agenda and popular support - for a better world. Of course the knowledge base I draw on is limited to Europe of an anglo-saxon variety - so I cannot (sadly) speak much about, for example, the Latin American experience of development which, patently, has a lot to teach us.

When setting up a new website in 2015 - Mapping the Common Ground - I tried to pull together my feelings about what was going on - I came up with some rather pessimistic conclusions -

1. The Virus of "Financialisation" threatens to choke healthy commercial endeavour and any respect for "the market"

- I belong to the generation which talked about "the mixed economy" ie understood and accepted the role of both the private and government sector in our lives. "Modern Capitalism" (in the phrase of Andrew Shonfield) had been tamed - management rather than ownership was seen in the late 50s as the key (with Tony Crosland's The Future of Socialism (1956) being the key document). How wrong we were!! The Market has been enshrined as the New God and ownership manipulated by financial managers to "extract wealth" ruthlessly from companies, employees and wider social interests. For the phrase "wealth creators" we need to substitute "wealth extractors"

2. Political parties are a bust flush

- All mainstream political parties in Europe have been affected by the neo-liberal virus and can no longer represent the concerns of ordinary people. And those "alternative parties" which survive the various hurdles placed in their way by the electoral process rarely survive.

The German Greens were an inspiration until they too eventually fell prey to the weaknesses of political parties identified a hundred years ago by Robert Michels.

More recently, "Pirate" parties in Scandinavia and Bepe Grillo's Italian Five Star Movement have managed, briefly, to capture public attention, occupy parliamentary benches but then sink to oblivion or fringe if not freak interest.

What the media call "populist" parties of various sorts attract bursts of electoral support in most countries but are led by labile individuals preying on public fears and prejudices and incapable of the sort of cooperative effort which serious change requires.

3. NGOs are no match for corporate power

- The annual World Social Forum has had more staying power than the various "Occupy movements" but its very diversity means that nothing coherent emerges to challenge the power elite whose "scriptures" are delivered from the pulpits of The World Bank and the OECD There doesn't even seem a common word to describe our condition and a vision for a better future - "social change"? What's that when it's at home?

4. The traditional claims of the "Third Estate" to hold power to account are now laughable

-this has been best exposed by writers such as John Keane - eg in "Media Decadence and Democracy" and other papers - and Patrick Chalmers in Fraudcast News

5. Academics are careerists

- the groves of academia are still sanctuary for a few brave voices who speak out against the careless transfer by governments of hundreds of billions of dollars to corporate interestsNoam Chomsky and David Harvey prominent examples.

- Henry Mintzberg, one of the great management gurus, has in the last decade broken ranks and now writes about the need for a profound "rebalancing" of the power structure - Rebalancing Society - radical renewal beyond left, right and centre

- Economists who challenge the conventional wisdom of that discipline are now able to use the Real-World Economics blog.
- Daniel Dorling is a geographer who focuses on inequalities eg his powerful Injustice - why social inequality persists.

6. Think Tanks play safe - and... think

- Most Think-Tanks play it safe (for funding reasons) - although there are honourable exceptions. Such as -

- Susan George, a European activist and writer, who operates from the Trans National Institute and, amongst her many books, has produced two marvellous satires - Lugano I and Lugano II
- David Korton's books and Yes Magazine keep up a steady critique.
- Joseph Stiglitz, once part of the World Bank elite, writes scathingly about economic conventional wisdom

7. Most Religions have lost their hold on people

- although Pope Frances has the resources of the Vatican behind him; and is proving a great example in the struggle for dignity and against privilege - particularly the 2015 Encyclical On Care for our Common Home

8. There are simply too many different diagnoses and prescriptions. Too many prophets and peacocks preening themselves....allocating blame....and announcing favourite recipes....all within a power structure which never really seems to change.....

- This is where, perhaps, things have now changed dramatically. In the first part of the 20th century educated people had religion, movements and ideologies to put their faith in. In the second part of the century we had things like managerialism and privatisation (in the US still religion) to give us continued faith that things could and would get better.

But the tectonic plates seem to have moved in the past decade -

- we have become aware that the "Western world" is only a small (and declining) part of the world
- we no longer trust the institutions of democracy and the market (let alone faiths) which were the core of our being.
- Corporate and bureaucratic power is evil and the very notion of political power laughable. All that seems left are disaggregated, atomistic and alienated individuals
- with most people no longer believing that the future has anything better to offer
- We cannot therefore agree any more on diagnoses - let alone on prescriptions.
- We are completely at sea...have no engines ...nor bearings....

Stories we tell



Since we were small children, we have all needed stories - to help us understand and come to terms with the strange world we inhabit. In this post-modern world, "narratives" have become a fashionable adult activity for the same reason.

It's significant that, when I was looking for a structure with which to classify the different approaches in the (vast) literature about the global crisis, I used the classification - micro-meso-macro. That shows the grip my university training in political economy still has on me. Political sociology actually had more appeal for

me in those days - but somehow lacked the apparent legitimacy of economics.

In fact, the anthropological ways of looking at the world have much more power than the economic - in particular the grid-group typology of Mary Douglas (and her Cultural Theory) which first gave us the four schools or lenses ("hierarchical", "individualistic", "egalitarian" and "fatalistic") used to such effect in Chris Hood's great little book "The Art of the State" (1990). It was indeed his book which introduced me to this typology which allows us to tell distinctive "stories" about the same phenomenon. More interestingly, he then shows the typical policy responses, weaknesses and strengths of each school. A sense of his book's argument can be gained from the review of the book which can be accessed toward the end of the contents sheet of this journal.

At University I had been interested in how social systems held together and why people (generally) obeyed - and I had liked Max Weber's classification of political systems into - "traditional", "charismatic" and "rational-legal".

But it was the sociologist Ametai Etzioni who first impressed me in the 1970s with his suggestion that we behaved the way we did for basically three different types of motives - "remunerative", "coercive" and "normative" - namely that it was made worth our while; we were forced to; or that we thought it right. He then went on to suggest (in his 1975 Social Problems) that our explanations for social problems could be grouped into equivalent political stances - "individualistic", "hierarchical" or "consensual". These are effectively "stories" about the world. Unfortunately google search will not give me access to the relevant works of Etzioni or Hood - although substantial chunks of a similar sort of book "Responses to Governance - governing corporations and societies in the world" by John Dixon can be read on google books.

During the 1980s, when I was doing my Masters in Policy Analysis, I was (briefly) interested in the potential of "Frame Analysis" which showed how we could tell different "stories" to make sense of complex social events.

The last decade has seen a revival of interest in such typologies - The case for clumsiness which, again, sets out the various stories which sustain the different positions people take us on various key policy issues - such as the global economic crisis and the ecological disaster staring us in the face. There is a good interview with the author here and a short summary here

Three recent reports give an excellent summary of all this literature -

- Common Cause;
- Finding Frames; and
- Keith Grint's Wicked Problems and Clumsy Solutions

Why we disagree about "wicked problems"

For years I've been searching for a book which did justice - in a clear and generous way - to the complexity of the world we inhabit; and which helped us place our own "confused take" on "wicked problems" into a wider schema. By far and away the best book is Why We Disagree about Climate Change - understanding controversy, inaction and opportunity by geographer Mike Hulme.

Hulme's book clarifies the climate debate by using seven different lenses (or perspectives) to make sense of climate change: science, economics, religion, psychology, media, development, and governance. His argument is basically that -

- We understand science and scientific knowledge in different ways
- We value things differently
- We believe different things about ourselves, the universe and our place in the universe
- We fear different things
- We receive multiple and conflicting messages about climate change - and interpret them differently
- We understand "development" differently
- We seek to govern in different ways (eg top-down "green governmentality"; market environmentalism; or "civic environmentalism")

Climate science is an instance of "post-normal science" (p. 78). In today's contentious political context, scientists must more than ever "*recognize and reflect upon their own values and upon the collective values of their colleagues. These values and world views continually seep into their activities as scientists and inflect the knowledge that is formed*" (p. 79).

Post-normal science also challenges how expertise is understood. People with varying backgrounds want and need to weigh in on important issues of the day, including climate change. Hence, natural science must cede some governance to wider society and some ground to "other ways of knowing" (p. 81). In post-normal science, moreover, people acknowledge that there is much that we cannot predict; uncertainty is intrinsic to climate change issues. The public and their political representatives may want certainty, but it is not available in regard to the behaviour of a chaotic system such as climate (pp. 83-84).

In chapter four, "The Endowment of Value," Hulme offers an exceptionally well-informed review of debates carried on by people with very different evaluations of what ought to be done about climate change. He remarks:

"We disagree about climate change because we view our responsibilities to future generations differently, because we value humans and Nature in different ways, and because we have different attitudes to climate risks" (p. 139).

Similarly, in chapter five, he maintains that: *"One of the reasons we disagree about climate change is because we believe different things about our duty to others, to Nature, and to our deities"* (p. 144). Hulme describes a host of competing but important views about such duties, including monotheistic stewardship of Creation, the responsibility to care for life, environmentalism as a religious discourse, the moral imperative to care for Gaia, and romantic views of nature. Theologies of blame arise, one of which accuses individuals of responsibility for climate change, another of which accuses socio-economic systems

Hulme maps the cultural categorization scheme of individualists, egalitarians, hierarchalists, and fatalists onto ecologist C.S. ("Buzz") Hollings' notion of the four "myths" about nature (p. 188). Hollings' myths, which describe the degree to which people think of nature as stable or unstable, are represented by four pictures depicting different arrangements of a ball in a landscape. The degree of natural stability is indicated by whether the ball is situated so as to resist change of location (nature as stable) or whether the ball is situated so as to be easily moved (nature as unstable).

- *The first picture, nature as "benign," depicts a ball sitting at the bottom of a U-shaped landscape. According to this view, favoured by individualists, nature is capable of maintaining or reestablishing its current organization despite human influence, such as introducing large amounts of CO2 into the atmosphere. Human-friendly nature will continue to operate within boundaries favourable to human life, so the risk posed by climate change is low. In other words, we do not have to "turn back the clock of technological change" (p. 190).*
- *The second picture, nature as "ephemeral," shows the ball as unstably perched atop a steep hill, thus easily thrown out of kilter by human interference. This view of nature, favoured by egalitarians, indicates that the risks posed by climate change are high, such that excessive fossil fuel use will likely lead to climate chaos and the collapse of civilization.*
- *The third picture, nature as "perverse/tolerant," shows the ball at the bottom of a deep valley formed by two hills. According to this view of nature, favoured by hierarchalists, nature is somewhat unpredictable, but also relatively resilient, if managed appropriately. Guided by scientific knowledge, we can develop predictive abilities that will allow us to formulate policies needed to limit climate change.*
- *Finally, the fourth picture, nature as "capricious," shows a ball sitting on a line. According to this view, favoured by fatalists, nature is basically unpredictable, given that its behaviour is influenced not only by human behaviour, but also by countless other factors, including many unknown to us. Climate will continue, as ever, to pose change and thus risk to humans, some of whom will cope, while others will not. For the fatalist, climate change of one sort or another will continue even if industrial civilization immediately grinds to a halt (pp.188-190).*

After entertaining the possibility of viewing climate change as either a "clumsy" problem or even as a "wicked" problem (one so complex that some proposed solutions end up undermining other solutions), Hulme concludes that climate is not a "problem" to be solved at all. Instead, it is an opportunity to transform how we understand ourselves and relate to one another.

The opportunity favoured by Hulme becomes clear in his discussion of what he calls the four leading "myths" of climate change: Lamenting Eden, Presaging Apocalypse, Constructing Babel, and

Celebrating Jubilee.

All four myths are taken from the Judeo-Christian tradition, which retains some of its original animating force, even though it has become marginalized in secular Euro-American cultures. They are

- *Lamenting Eden is the myth adhered to by postmodern greens who bemoan the loss of pristine nature and simpler ways of life.*
- *Presaging Apocalypse is the myth adhered to by traditional conservatives who depict climate change in terms of calamities that exact cosmic retribution for human depravity, notions with a long and often critically unscrutinized lineage.*
- *Constructing Babel is the myth adhered to by rational moderns who, as in the Genesis myth of Babel, seek to become like God by developing technological power. Whereas the peoples at Babylon sought to build a tower reaching to heaven, contemporary geoengineers propose technical means to gain control over climate.*
- *The fourth and final myth, Celebrating Jubilee, is consistent with Hulme's vision of what climate change can do for us. Jubilee takes its name from the Jewish Torah, according to which every 50 years "soil, slaves and debtors should be liberated from their oppression." Metaphorically, then, Celebrating Jubilee encourages us think about climate change in terms of morals and ethics, and "offers hope as an antidote to the presaging of Apocalypse" (pp. 353, 354)*

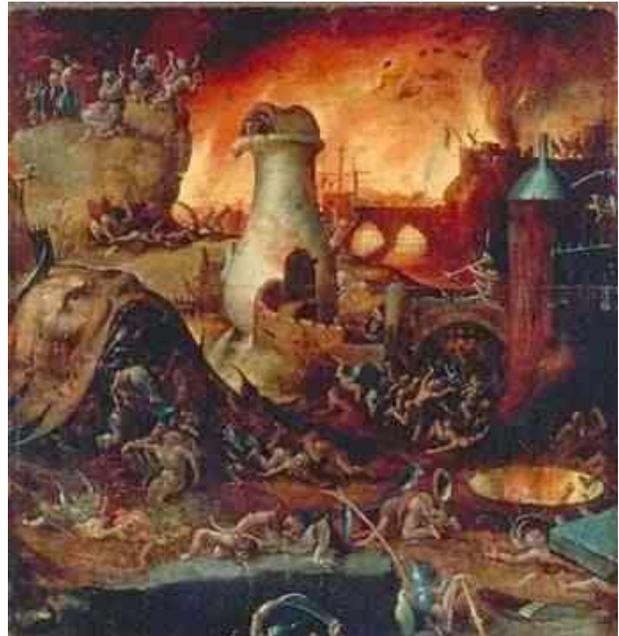
An excellent comparative review of Hulme's book [can be read here](#).

The challenge for me now is to find someone capable of doing the same for the global economic crisis!

July 2014

In which the Scale of our moral collapse is Exposed

Dave Pollard is a Canadian of my generation who writes wisely about our epoch - and caught our social ills well recently with this post about thirteen trends in social behaviour which, he suggests, epitomise our times and a slow collapse in our "civilisation"



Here are the shifts I am seeing that would seem to epitomize early collapse:

- 1. **Corporations have given up the pretence of being ethical.** At first, a decade or two ago, many corporations tried to convince the public they were really concerned about social and environmental issues. Then they discovered that whitewashing, greenwashing, and lies in their advertising and PR were more effective and cheaper. Now they don't even bother to lie. They just say they are forced to do what they do because their mandate is to maximize profits. Now they settle their malfeasance out of court because it's cheaper than obeying the law, and hush it up with gag orders, whistle-blower prosecutions and threats of costly and protracted litigation against anyone who dares challenge their illegal activities. Now they buy their politicians openly. Instead of them serving us, as they were designed to do, it is now us against them. Now it is illegal for citizens to film animal cruelty atrocities in factory farms and slaughterhouses, but not illegal for corporations to commit those atrocities.*
- 2. **Politicians have given up the pretence of being representative.** Speeches no longer talk about "the people" or a better society or collective interest, but solely about response to intangible, invented or inflated dangers like "terrorism" and "illegal" immigration (but not the real dangers, since that would offend their owners). Gerrymandering, bribes, voter disenfranchisement and vote-buying are now accepted as just how the system inevitably works. Political influence and political decision-making are now totally and overtly a function of the amount of paid lobbying and money spent. The term "democracy" is now conflated with "freedom" and Orwellian use of language is openly employed to suppress public opposition, dissent and outrage.*
- 3. **Lying has becoming rampant, overt and even socially acceptable.** The biggest and easiest lies are the lies of omission: burying corporatist and ideological legislation and pork in "omnibus" bills and "riders", gross distortions of measures like unemployment and inflation, burying junk investments in opaque repackaged and overpriced offerings to the public, activities couched to offer perpetrators "plausible deniability", and unlisted ingredients and unlisted dangers on product packaging. Another example is lawmakers passing "popular" laws but telling regulatory staff not to enforce them or "look the other way", or starving the regulators of resources. But more egregious is the overt lying, led by the outrageous (and again Orwellian) untruths of almost all modern advertising and PR (including political campaign advertising), which we are now forced by every*

means possible to watch/listen to/read. And of course, just about everything done by the legal "profession" who are paid to obfuscate, threaten and lie, and the mainstream media, who are paid to report only distracting news that does not offend corporate sponsors, and to oversimplify and distort to pander to their dumbed-down audience.

4. **Widespread use and acceptance of "ends justify the means" rationalizations.** This is the hallmark behaviour of the Dick Cheneys and other severely psychologically damaged people who prevail disproportionately in position of power. Consequentialists rationalize that, immoral as their actions might be (or might have been), the outcome will be (or was) a desirable one. This argument allows them to decide to wage wars and commit other acts of violence (and almost all major recent wars and major acts of violence have been rationalized on this basis). What's worse, when the desired "ends" are not achieved (liberation of women in Afghanistan), the shifting of blame to others for the failure to achieve the ends is used to excuse both the failure to achieve the ends and for the abhorrence of the means. Probe just about any act of violence, any lie, or any illegal or immoral behaviour that someone is justifying or excusing these days, and you'll find an "ends (would have) justified the means" rationalization. It's endemic, and not only among right-wingers. And few of us have the critical thinking skills to see its dangers.

5. **Human activity (litigation, security, financial "products" etc.) is focused on defending the status quo rather than producing anything of value.** The reason most of us could not survive today in the radically decentralized, low-complexity societies that will take hold after civilization's collapse, is that most of us don't produce anything that peers in our community value, or ever will value. We are "managers" of useless hierarchies, paper pushers, systems people, guards, number crunchers, packagers, transporters and vendors of goods we do not know how to make, with parts we don't know the origin or makeup of. Because we intuitively "know" that this is so, we are desperate to keep civilization's crumbling systems operating. What else could we do?

6. **The illusion of growth has become totally dependent on increases in oil and in debt.** In a presentation here the other day, economist Nate Hagens revealed that since 2000 96% of all US GDP growth has come from more consumption of primary energy, not from increases in production or efficiency or "innovation", and that it now takes creation of \$14 of new debt (i.e. printing of currency) to produce \$1 of GDP. So when economists and politicians say they want a return to growth (to avoid a collapse of the Ponzi scheme stock and housing markets, among other reasons), what they are really saying is that they want us to burn more fossil fuels and print more money.

7. **Acceptance of obscene inequality.** People just shrug when they learn that the entire increase in global income and wealth since the 1970s has accrued to just 1% of the population — everyone else's real income (purchasing power) and wealth has declined (i.e. they're further into debt), in many cases precipitously. This is despite the fact that this increase in income and wealth has come at a ghastly and accelerating social, political and ecological cost. The Occupy movement tried to challenge this, but the movement is dormant.

8. **Denial of reality, across the political spectrum.** Most of us (except in the US and a few other backward countries) now appreciate that climate change is caused by burning fossil fuels and is dangerously accelerating. But most of us still believe, in the face of overwhelming evidence to the contrary, that it is somehow possible to change global behaviour so radically that we reverse

emissions and prevent runaway climate change, or that we're going to somehow replace most emissions with renewable energy or other "innovations". Most deny the reality that our education and health care systems are dysfunctional and unsustainable, that the Internet is a huge consumer of energy dependent on the industrial growth economy for its existence, that species extinction has already accelerated to a point unprecedented in the planet's history and threatens the stability of every ecosystem, that our political, economic and legal systems are so dysfunctional they cannot be salvaged, that industrial agriculture has already destroyed most of the soils crucial for our survival, that choosing short-term jobs over long-term economic and ecological health is disastrous, and that "sustainable growth" is an oxymoron. For those who aren't in denial, the ever-growing cognitive dissonance in the media and in public discourse is staggering.

9. **Widespread cynicism and acceptance of conspiracy theories.** Stephen Colbert wrote "Cynicism masquerades as wisdom, but it is the farthest thing from it. Because cynics don't learn anything. Because cynicism is a self-imposed blindness, a rejection of the world because we are afraid it will hurt us or disappoint us." Cynics are, as George Carlin said, disappointed idealists. The rampant growth of cynicism reveals a similar increase in fear and disappointment. Conspiracy theories are popular because they give us someone else to blame (someone huge, mysterious and unstoppable, hence relieving us of the obligation to do anything or even to understand what is really happening), and because they feed our cynicism, and because we all want something simple to believe instead of the impossible complexity of the truth. And that desire for something simple to believe also inspires...

10. **Search for and willingness to believe in charismatic people and magical solutions.** Hardly a day goes by when I don't see another promise of a technology that will provide infinite, cheap, climate-saving energy. Judging from the number of views these articles/videos receive, they are magnets for public attention. And when we're constantly disappointed by "leaders" to promise us "hope" and change, it is not surprising that so many fall under the influence of zealous charismatic people with absurd (and discredited) but miraculous (and simple) political and economic and technological "solutions" to every problem. The world's last powerful charismatic leader, the despotic Mao, killed 80 million of his country's citizens while keeping ten times that number in thrall. Notice the charismatic tilt of many of the new leaders of the fearful Randian/Thatcherian/Reaganite right, and the leaders of many popular new age cults.

11. **Ubiquitous spying and corporatist surveillance.** I don't think I need elaborate on this, except to note that the corporate sector's use of collected intelligence and surveillance in its many forms dwarfs that of the more obvious government and military sector. The military-industrial complex is back. So far it's too incompetent to figure out how to use the data it's collecting, but they're spending an awful lot of our money working on that. Their level of anxiety is rising too — they're tuned into the general dissatisfaction and are afraid of civil insurrection upsetting their lucrative and high-maintenance apple-cart. (If only.)

12. **Self-colonization and the emergence of "apologism" and mandatory optimism.** We've seen the emergence of mandatory optimism in the corporate world, and more overtly in the prerequisite for being a TED talker and other "positive thinking" movements. But now the vilification of criticism and pessimism (as distinct from cynicism) is becoming more ubiquitous. Critical thinking and doubt are dismissed out-of-hand as negativity and a "bad attitude" even in peer conversation. When

internalized to the point we feel bad about feeling bad, it's an essential tool of self-colonization — the co-opting and self-censoring of our own anger, skepticism, fear, sadness, grief, and 'unpopular' beliefs in order to be socially accepted by others, and in some cases to brainwash ourselves into denial of our own feelings and beliefs that we are struggling to cope with — and reconcile with what others are saying they feel and believe (there's that cognitive dissonance again: "If I'm the only one thinking this, I must be crazy, so I'd better not talk about it"). What all this produces is something now called "apologism" — a propensity to make excuses and minimize an event or belief or feeling because you don't want to seem "always" critical or out of step with the mainstream or peers. In its worst form it emerges as a victim-blaming defence for atrocities like assault, harassment or abuse. But in its milder form it can lead to dangerous group-think, the suppression of new and important ideas, and destructive self-blaming.

13. Widespread anomie and the trivialization and co-opting of dissent by professional activists. *The term anomie means a disconnection between ones personal values and one's community's values. It refers to a state of 'rudderlessness' where it is difficult to find one's authentic place or engage in meaningful social interaction with most others, especially those in different demographics. In a major international study, pollster Michael Adams found it increasingly prevalent in young people, and on the rise in all age groups. Adams remarked on how Americans in particular were becoming increasingly "suspicious of and indifferent to the plight of their fellow citizens". The disengagement of the young explains why so many activist groups are dominated by older people (a new phenomenon in the last half-century). Unfortunately, the activist vacuum has allowed professional environmental groups (Greenpeace, 350 etc.) to co-opt much of the activist movement's activities, creating a constant manageable "trivial theatre of dissent" that is comfortable for many older people opposed to violence and confrontation, and comfortable for the corporations and politicians because it's controlled and unthreatening. Mainstream media like it because it's simplified, dichotomous and often specifically orchestrated for their cameras. And it creates easy, stable, well-paying jobs for mainstream environmental group spokespeople, while changing absolutely nothing.*

While I believe most of these trends and emergences are complex collective responses to changing realities, and either well-intentioned or unconscious (i.e. without malicious intent), taken together they would seem to evince a broad, intuitive shift in our collective gestalt, our way of coping with the world. They reveal more than anything, I think, a giving up of the belief in fairness, justice, controllability, understandability and consensus as means of "making sense" or taking action reliably to achieve desired objectives in the current reality of how things work.

They reveal both the incapacity of our now massively-overgrown, fragile and unwieldy systems to function sustainably or effectively, and the incapacity of ourselves and our broken communities to function effectively within their purview.

October 2014

in which we meet the devil on the Staircase

It's a very serious stage in one's life (particularly that of a political activist) when one feels it necessary to advise friends to have nothing to do with politicians and political parties. What is the alternative? A life of quietism and religious commitment?

I am indebted to my friend Ivan Daraktchiev for the short story 'Tale of The Staircase' by Hristo Smirnenski (1898-1923) which has apparently been much quoted in the Bulgarian Parliament over the past 2 decades.

A man of the people who goes to represent his people to the king is stopped at a staircase by a devil. At each step the devil asks him for a gift to move ahead.

The devil asks first for his ears; then for his eyes; and finally for his heart and memory. So in the end when he meets the King he cannot hear the cry of his people, cannot see the naked bleeding bodies of his people and also has no memory about their suffering. Thus the man of the people becomes the man of the state.

The key part of the story goes as follows -

"I have no gold. I have nothing with which to bribe you... I am poor, a youth in rags... But I am willing to give up my life..." The Devil smiled: *"O no, I do not ask as much as that. Just give me your hearing."*

"My hearing? Gladly... May I never hear anything any more, may I..." "You still shall hear," the Devil assured him, and made way for him. *"Pass!"*

The young man set off at a run and had taken three steps in one stride when the hairy hand of the Devil caught him. "That's enough! Now pause and listen to your brothers groaning below." The young man paused and listened - "How strange! Why have they suddenly begun to sing happy songs and to laugh light-heartedly?..."

Again he sets off at a run. Again the Devil stopped him. "For you to go three more steps I must have your eyes." The young man made a gesture of despair. "But then I shall be unable to see my brothers or those I go to punish." "You still shall see them..." The Devil said. "I will give you different, much better eyes."

The young man rose three more steps and looked back. "See your brothers' naked bleeding bodies," the Devil prompted him. "My God, how very strange! When did they manage to don such beautiful clothes? And not bleeding wounds but splendid red roses deck their bodies..." The young man proceeded, willingly giving everything he had in order to reach his goal and to punish the well-fed nobles and princes.

Now one step, just one last step remained and he would be at the top. Then indeed he would avenge his brothers. "Young man, one last step still remains. Just one more step and you shall have your revenge. But for this last step I always exact a double toll: give me your heart and give me your memory."

The young man protested. "My heart? No, that is too cruel!" The Devil gave a deep and masterful laugh: "I am not so cruel as you imagine. In exchange I will give you a heart of gold and a brand-new memory. But if you refuse me, then you shall never avenge your brothers whose faces are the colour of sand and who groan more bitterly than December blizzards." The young man saw irony in the Devil's green eyes.

*"But there will be nobody then more wretched than I. You are taking away all my human nature."
"On the contrary, nobody shall be happier than you. Well, do you agree: just your heart and memory?"*

The young man pondered, his face clouded over, beads of sweat ran from the furrowed brow, in anger he tightened his fists and through clenched teeth said: "Very well, then. Take them!" ...

And like a swift summer storm of rage and wrath, his dark locks flying in the wind, he crossed the final step. He was now at the very top.

And a broad smile suddenly in his face, his eyes now shone with tranquil joy and his fists relaxed. He looked at the nobles revelling there and looked down to the roaring, cursing, grey ragged crowds below. He gazed, but not a muscle of his face quivered: his face was radiant, happy and content. The crowds he saw below were in holiday attire and their groans were now hymns.

Only the Greens (and particularly the Germans) have properly recognised and tried to deal with the problem of the corruption of leadership (the iron law of oligarchy)

The pessimism I feel about the performance capacity of governments relates to my experience and understanding of (a) the UK system since 1968 and (b) the so-called transition countries of Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia in which I have worked and lived for the past 20 years. I have a more open mind about the situation of the Scandinavian countries (in one of which I have briefly worked and lived); of Federal Germany and of the consensual Netherlands (although consensual Belgium and Austria have been disasters). But the UK system has become ever more centralised and adversarial in my lifetime - and these two characteristics seem to me to affect the chances of policy success in that country -

- Policies are imposed - rather than negotiated or thought through
- They are often very poorly designed (eg the poll-tax; rail privatisation; the whole Stalinist target system - with all the counter-productivities that involves)
- Ministers have a high turnover rate (Ministers of Finance excepted)
- Implementation is very poor (see agency theory)
- Morale of public servants is low (political hostility; targets; frequency and number of new initiatives; crude management)
- Changes in government lead to cancellation of programmes

Such governance arrangements as a whole do not excite much interest in Britain - but issues relating to the operation of the political system (and of what is felt to be the disenfranchisement of the citizen) do. Concerns about the British political system were so great that a completely independent inquiry was established in 2004 (funded by the Rowntree Trust) reporting in 2006 and leading to the establishment of a campaign in late 2009 to try to extract commitments from parties and candidates to electoral reform and greater citizen influence in government. Here is one important comment and discussion thread about the process - which has disappeared without a trace

A highly ironic report on the operation of the British system was published by Stuart Weir and Democratic Audit to coincide with the launch of the campaign

Economics and Management as the new religion

This is a period of my life when I try to sort out the sense and the nonsense from what I have absorbed from the social science literature which I first started to take seriously some 50 years ago. In those days, economics and the study of organisations were the focus of serious intellectual study - but by a tiny minority and in a highly rarified atmosphere. The 1960s was, however, when social science teaching started to expand in universities and make claims for itself which have only recently started to be questioned.

A tiny minority of courageous academics did try to blow the whistle earlier - in particular Prof Stanislaw Andreski in his magnificent 1972 book [Social Science as Sorcery](#).

Epiphanies (or "Eureka!" moments) are memorable - and I therefore remember the moment in the flat I had for a couple of years in central Bishkek flicking through a book I had picked from my kitchen shelf - [Reformation -Europe's House Divided](#) - and suddenly realising that the intense disputations about religious doctrine in this period were remarkably similar to contemporary economic disputes.

Other people, of course, have developed this theme of the religious role taken by modern management and economics - for example Susan George in her 1994 book [Faith and Credit](#) - a tough critique of the World Bank which was the subject of a [brilliant satire here](#)

And a recent book was entitled [The New Holy Wars - economic religion versus environmental religion](#). In the early 90s, a book actually bore the title [Economics as Religion](#) - and its [Introduction can be read here](#)

The Economics trade has been under increasing attack for about a decade - from behavioural economists [and others](#) - but its pretensions blown apart by the ongoing global crisis.

You would think that "Management" offers an easier target since it patently has less reason to claim scientific status - not that this has prevented such claims being made! Charles Handy's [Gods of Management](#) is actually about "cultures" of management and resists the temptation to explode the pretensions of management gurus.

It is not easy to find a book on "management as religion" - although there are several classics which have a go at the management gurus and one of them (Russell Ackoff) actually (and famously) wrote [A Little Book of F-Laws](#)

Eventually my search produced a 1997 book [The Faith of the Managers - when management becomes religion](#)

So much damage has been done to the arbitrary drive for "Efficiency" that one would have thought the time is overdue for a savage critique of the religion of management, And management thinking has, arguably, done equal damage to our societies and has escaped proper scrutiny - which is why I want to draw your attention to Chris Grey's [A Very Short, Fairly Interesting and Reasonably Cheap Book about Studying Organisations](#)

- *"imagine a world where the thing which dominated it (God; the Party) was written about in one of three ways. One was like a bible, very heavy and orthodox. The second was amusing and readable but didn't tell you anything you couldn't think for yourself. The third seemed to say some things you wouldn't think yourself and suggested flaws in the Bible but you couldn't understand it because it was so obscurely written. Such is the literature of organisations - in which we live our lives and yet are served by only Textbooks; pop management; and unreadable scholarly books or articles".*
- *Writers on organisations belong to one of two schools - those who believe "there exists an observable, objective organisational reality which exists independent of organisation theory. The task of OT is to uncover this reality and discover the laws by which it operates - and perhaps then to predict if not control future events. They tend to favour quantitative research. These are the positivists. Then there is a second camp which denies this scientific view - they might be called constructivists or relativists since, for them, organisational reality is constructed by people in organisations and by organisation theory".*
- *The history of organisation theory you find in textbooks generally starts with the concept of "bureaucracy" as defined by Weber and with that of "scientific management" as set out by FW Taylor - both of whom were active in a 25 year period from the late 1880s to the end of the first world war, one as a (legal) academic in Prussia, the other as an engineer and early consultant in American steel mills in Pennsylvania.*
- *Weber was curious about the various motives there have been over history and societies for obedience. Why exactly have we accepted the authority of those with power? His answer gave us a typology of authority we still use today - "traditional", "charismatic" and what he called "rational-legal" which he saw developing in his time. A system of (fair) rules which made arbitrary (privileging) behaviour difficult. But this was an "ideal type" (ie a model) - not necessarily a precise description or prescription. Indeed studies from the mid 1950s showed just how much informal power there was in bureaucracies.*
- *Taylor worked in an industry where it was normal for workers to organise their own work; and where owners tended to be Presbyterean and workers catholic immigrants. Taylor reckoned there was a lot of slacking going on - and applied a "scientific" approach to devise standards and measures of performance (time and motion) as well as "scientific" selection of workers and a strict separation of workers and managers.*
- *This caused strong reactions not only amongst workers but from many owners and only survived thanks to the production needs of the First World War*
- *The "evacuation of meaning" from work was intensified by Fordism.*
- *the "human resource" approach to management which followed was not the fundamental break which the textbooks portray but rather a cleverer legitimisation of management power - as was the cultural management (and TQM) of the latter part of the 20th century.*

• *Although managers call the shots, their organisational fashions always fail - because of unintended effects*

• *Business schools do not produce better managers - but rather give the breed legitimisation; self-confidence; a shared world-view and a common (mystifying) language*

One quote perhaps captures his argument "For all the talk about new paradigms, contemporary organisation theory and management method remain remarkably unchanged from their classical roots...because the underlying philosophy of instrumental rationality and control remains firmly in the ascendant",

In the 1970s we had people like Ivan Illich and Paolo Freire exposing the emptiness of the doctrines which sustained the power of education and health systems. We now desperately need people like this to help us tear apart the arbitrary assumptions which sustain the legitimacy of the new priests of technocracy. Daniel Dorling's recent book *Injustice - why social inequality persists* is exceptional because he tries to identify and then challenge the belief systems which sustain our present inequities.

There are hundreds of thousands of academics receiving public money to teach and research so-called social "sciences" in universities and public institutions. The vast majority of them, whether they realise it or not, have been part of a large brain-washing exercise.

A few of them only have broken ranks - not just the economists I have mentioned but those (generally American) sociologists who, for a few years, have been advocating what they call "[public sociologies](#)". [Michael Burrowoy](#) has been one of the main protagonists.

Noone, however, should be under any illusions about the difficulties of making an intellectual challenge on this field of management and organisation studies in which so many brains, reputations and careers are now entrenched. There is, of course, an academic discipline called "Critical Management Studies" one of whose foremost proponents is Chris Grey whose small [book about studying organisations](#) is a clear and powerful read. But the discipline as a whole is a let-down and rarely offers good insights - "[Against Management](#)" is a good example

<http://www.greattransition.org/publication/the-church-of-economism-and-its-discontents>

Against technocracy

We talk loosely about the moral emptiness of the modern world - perhaps particularly at this time of year when consumerism is so much in our faces. "Me-me" has become the central driving force and egocentricity the name of the only game in town. An increasing question for many of my generation is how to develop a coherent set of stories and messages capable of persuading our societies of the need to change track - and in what way? To some of us it seems that a rediscovery of the ethic of social responsibility is an important part of the answer. But our educational institutions seem unable to deal with values. We are by nature, says de Botton in Religion for Atheists, "fragile and capricious - beset by fantasies of omnipotence, worlds away from being able to command even a modicum of the good sense and calm that secular education takes as the starting point for its own pedagogy". However, he continues -



...ideas need not just to be presented, but also repeated. The Christian calendar does this, as does the set daily liturgy.

Secular society, on the other hand, leaves us free - presenting us with a constant stream of new information, and prompting us to forget the lot. It expects us to spontaneously find our way to the ideas that matter to us, and gives us weekends off for consumption and recreation. It's the 'news' which occupies the position of authority in the secular sphere which the liturgical calendar has in the religious one. Matins become the breakfast bulletin, vespers the evening report. Its prestige is founded on the assumptions that our lives are poised on the verge of transformation due to the 2 driving forces of modern history: politics and technology. Religious texts, by contrast, are written on stone, books are few and thoroughly absorbed.

We are familiar enough with the major categories of the humanities as they are taught in secular universities - history and anthropology, literature and philosophy - as well as with the sorts of examination questions they produce: Who were the Carolingians? Where did phenomenology originate? What did Emerson want? We know too that this scheme leaves the emotional aspects of our characters to develop spontaneously, or at the very least in private, perhaps when we are with our families or out on solitary walks in the countryside.

In contrast, Christianity concerns itself from the outset with the inner confused side of us, declaring that we are none of us born knowing how to live; Christianity is focused on helping a part of us that secular language struggles even to name, which is not precisely intelligence or emotion, not character or personality, but another, even more abstract entity loosely connected with all of those and yet differentiated from them by an additional ethical and transcendent dimension - and to which we may as well refer, following Christian terminology, as the soul. It has been the essential task of the Christian pedagogic machine to nurture, reassure, comfort and guide our souls. p112-13

I rarely miss an opportunity to castigate the modern university for its ever-increasing compartmentalisation of knowledge and marginalisation, indeed stigmatisation, of inter-disciplinary

work. If ever an occupation deserved the accusation of insidious conduct of the "trahison des clercs" it is the modern academic - in their ivory towers and, with a few honourable exceptions, being indifferent to the fate of humanity. As de Botton puts it -

*The modern university appears to have little interest in teaching emotional or ethical life skills, much less how to love their neighbours and leave the world happier than they found it. Scripture used to do this; and since the C19th the hope has been that culture could replace scripture in helping people find meaning, understand themselves, behave morally, forgive others and confront their own mortality. So we could turn to Marcus Aurelius, Boccaccio, Wagner and Turner instead. It's an odd proposition - but maybe not so much absurd as unfamiliar. Novels do impart moral instruction; paintings do make suggestions about happiness; literature can change our lives, philosophy can offer consolations. **But while universities have achieved unparalleled expertise in imparting factual info about culture, they remain uninterested in training students to use it as a repertoire of wisdom.** 'So opposed have many atheists been to the content of religious belief that they have omitted to appreciate its inspiring and still valid overall object: to provide us with well-structured advice on how to lead our lives.' (page 111).*

Christianity meanwhile looks at the purpose of education from another angle, because it has an entirely different concept of human nature. It has no patience with theories that dwell on our independence or our maturity. It instead believes us to be at heart desperate, fragile, vulnerable, sinful creatures, a good deal less wise than we are knowledgeable, always on the verge of anxiety, tortured by our relationships, terrified of death - and most of all in need of God.

John Wesley used to preach on being kind, staying obedient to parents, visiting the sick, caution against bigotry. He said 'I design plain truth for plain people: therefore... I abstain from all nice and philosophical speculations; from all perplexed and intricate reasonings; and as far as possible, from even the show of learning. My design is... to forget all that ever I have read in my life.' (page 120). 'We on the other hand have constructed an intellectual world whose most celebrated institutions rarely consent to ask, let alone answer, the most serious questions of the soul.' (p 121) Maybe we need a new kind of university, one which had a dept for relationships, an institute of dying and a centre for self knowledge. Then there's the method - impassioned preaching makes a difference to the engagement and impact. 'Secular education will never succeed in reaching its potential until humanities lecturers are sent to be trained by African-American Pentecostal preachers.' (p131). Summary: Religions teach wisdom; secular societies offer information.

17 December 2013

In which A Letter to the Young Generation is discovered

Let me share with you the eloquent final thoughts of a seasoned campaigner which were found on his laptop after his death

As I survey my life, which is coming near its end, I want to set down a few thoughts that might be useful to those coming after. It will soon be time for me to give back to Gaia the nutrients that I have used during a long, busy, and happy life. I am not bitter or resentful at the approaching end; I



have been one of the extraordinarily lucky ones. So it behoves me here to gather together some thoughts and attitudes that may prove useful in the dark times we are facing: a century or more of exceedingly difficult times. How will those who survive manage it? What can we teach our friends, our children, our communities? Although we may not be capable of changing history, how can we equip ourselves to survive it?

I contemplate these questions in the full consciousness of my own mortality. Being offered an actual number of likely months to live, even though the estimate is uncertain, mightily focuses the mind. On personal things, of course,

on loved ones and even loved things, but also on the Big Picture. But let us begin with last things first, for a change. The analysis will come later, for those who wish it.

Hope. *Children exude hope, even under the most terrible conditions, and that must inspire us as our conditions get worse. Hopeful patients recover better. Hopeful test candidates score better. Hopeful builders construct better buildings. Hopeful parents produce secure and resilient children. In groups, an atmosphere of hope is essential to shared successful effort: "Yes, we can!" is not an empty slogan, but a mantra for people who intend to do something together — whether it is rescuing victims of hurricanes, rebuilding flood-damaged buildings on higher ground, helping wounded people through first aid, or inventing new social structures (perhaps one in which only people are "persons," not corporations). We cannot know what threats we will face. But ingenuity against adversity is one of our species' built-in resources. We cope, and faith in our coping capacity is perhaps our biggest resource of all.*

Mutual support. *The people who do best at basic survival tasks (we know this experimentally, as well as intuitively) are cooperative, good at teamwork, often altruistic, mindful of the common good. In drastic emergencies like hurricanes or earthquakes, people surprise us by their sacrifices — of food, of shelter, even sometimes of life itself. Those who survive social or economic collapse, or wars, or pandemics, or starvation, will be those who manage scarce resources fairly; hoarders and dominators win only in the short run, and end up dead, exiled, or friendless. So, in every way we can we need to help each other, and our children, learn to be cooperative rather than competitive; to be*

helpful rather than hurtful; to look out for the communities of which we are a part, and on which we ultimately depend.

Practical skills. With the movement into cities of the U.S. population, and much of the rest of the world's people, we have had a massive de-skilling in how to do practical tasks. When I was a boy in the country, all of us knew how to build a tree house, or construct a small hut, or raise chickens, or grow beans, or screw pipes together to deliver water. It was a sexist world, of course, so when some of my chums in eighth grade said we wanted to learn girls' "home ec" skills like making bread or boiling eggs, the teachers were shocked, but we got to do it. There was widespread competence in fixing things — impossible with most modern contrivances, of course, but still reasonable for the basic tools of survival: pots and pans, bicycles, quilts, tents, storage boxes.

We all need to learn, or relearn, how we would keep the rudiments of life going if there were no paid specialists around, or means to pay them.

Every child should learn elementary carpentry, from layout and sawing to driving nails. Everybody should know how to chop wood safely, and build a fire. Everybody should know what to do if dangers appear from fire, flood, electric wires down, and the like. Taking care of each other is one practical step at a time, most of them requiring help from at least one other person; survival is a team sport.

Organize. Much of the American ideology, our shared and usually unspoken assumptions, is hyper-individualistic. We like to imagine that heroes are solitary, have super powers, and glory in violence, and that if our work lives and business lives seem tamer, underneath they are still struggles red in blood and claw. We have sought solitude on the prairies, as cowboys on the range, in our dependence on media (rather than real people), and even in our cars, armored cabins of solitude. We have an uneasy and doubting attitude about government, as if we all reserve the right to be outlaws. But of course human society, like ecological webs, is a complex dance of mutual support and restraint, and if we are lucky it operates by laws openly arrived at and approved by the populace.



If the teetering structure of corporate domination, with its monetary control of Congress and our other institutions, should collapse of its own greed, and the government be unable to rescue it, we will have to reorganize a government that suits the people. We will have to know how to organize groups, how to compromise with other groups, how to argue in public for our positions. It turns out that "brainstorming," a totally noncritical process in which people just throw out ideas wildly, doesn't produce workable ideas. In particular, it doesn't work as well as groups in which ideas are proposed, critiqued, improved, debated. But like any group process, this must be protected from domination by powerful people and also over-talkative people. When the group recognizes its group power, it can limit these distortions. Thinking together is enormously creative; it has huge survival value.

Learn to live with contradictions. These are dark times, these are bright times. We are implacably making the planet less habitable. Every time a new oil field is discovered, the press cheers: "Hooray, there is more fuel for the self-destroying machines!" We are turning more land into deserts and parking lots. We are wiping out innumerable species that are not only wondrous and beautiful, but might be useful to us. We are multiplying to the point where our needs and our wastes outweigh the capacities of the biosphere to produce and absorb them. And yet, despite the bloody headlines and the rocketing military budgets, we are also, unbelievably, killing fewer of each other proportionately than in earlier centuries. We have mobilized enormous global intelligence and mutual curiosity, through the Internet and outside it.

We have even evolved, spottily, a global understanding that democracy is better than tyranny, that love and tolerance are better than hate, that hope is better than rage and despair, that we are prone, especially in catastrophes, to be astonishingly helpful and cooperative. We may even have begun to share an understanding that while the dark times may continue for generations, in time new growth and regeneration will begin. In the biological process called "succession," a desolate, disturbed area is gradually, by a predictable sequence of returning plants, restored to ecological continuity and durability.

When old institutions and habits break down or consume themselves, new experimental shoots begin to appear, and people explore and test and share new and better ways to survive together. It is never easy or simple. But already we see, under the crumbling surface of the conventional world, promising developments: new ways of organizing economic activity (cooperatives, worker-owned companies, nonprofits, trusts), new ways of using low-impact technology to capture solar energy, to sequester carbon dioxide, new ways of building compact, congenial cities that are low (or even self-sufficient) in energy use, low in waste production, high in recycling of almost everything.

A vision of sustainability that sometimes shockingly resembles Ecotopia is tremulously coming into existence at the hands of people who never heard of the book. Now in principle, the Big Picture seems simple enough, though devilishly complex in the details.

We live in the declining years of what is still the biggest economy in the world, where a looter elite has fastened itself upon the decaying carcass of the empire. It is intent on speedily and relentlessly extracting the maximum wealth from that carcass, impoverishing our former working middle class.

But this maggot class does not invest its profits here. By law and by stock-market pressures, corporations must seek their highest possible profits, no matter the social or national consequences — which means moving capital and resources abroad, wherever profit potential is larger. As Karl Marx darkly remarked, "Capital has no country," and in the conditions of globalization his meaning has come clear. The looter elite systematically exports jobs, skills, knowledge, technology, retaining at home chiefly financial manipulation expertise: highly profitable, but not of actual productive value. Through "productivity gains" and speedups, it extracts maximum profit from domestic employees; then, firing the surplus, it claims surprise that the great mass of people lack purchasing power to buy up what the economy can still produce (or import).

The first sketch at the top is one I found in several drawerfulls of Ilia Petrov rough sketches. I suppose it's from the 1944 period here.....The aquarelle is one of several (from the 1970s) I have from Vassil Vulev (when I met him a couple of years ago) who's still going at 79/80-

February 2014

Three years passed - Brexit - Trump

The Revenge of History?

We have become fat, lazy and careless.....taking the levels of financial and institutional security enjoyed from the 1950s through to the 1990s too much for granted ("we" being the citizens of the core European states and the US)

And whatever lessons the post-war generation learned about the killing fields of Europe in the first half of the 20th century have clearly not been properly absorbed by their descendants...Nuclear war was a real and evident threat until the late 70s and seemed to have disappeared with the demise of the Soviet Union.

For many, therefore, the last 6 months have been a rude awakening - as the final vestiges of public trust in (government) leadership came crashing down and we found our attention being directed to the last time we confronted such uncertainty - the 1930s.

But at last a sense of history is beginning to develop again. A couple of articles crystallised this for me - first [one by Tobias Stone](#) which actually appeared last summer -

Themes of intellectual discussion
The managerial revolution End of capitalism
Keynesianism Meritocracy New world order
End of ideology Revisionism Private affluence/public squalour
Corporate planning Modernisation of society Participation critique of professionals
Costs of economic growth Public choice theory Small is beautiful Change

During the Centenary of the [Battle of the Somme](#) I was struck that it was a direct outcome of the [assassination of an Austrian Arch Duke in Bosnia](#). I very much doubt anyone at the time thought the killing of a minor European royal would lead to the death of 17 million people. My point is that this is a cycle. It happens again and again, but as most people only have a 50-100 year historical perspective (from parents and school) they don't see that it's happening again.

As the events that led to the First World War unfolded, there were a few brilliant minds who started to warn that something big was wrong, that the web of treaties across Europe could lead to a war, but they were dismissed as hysterical, mad, or fools, as is always the way, and as people who worry about Putin, Brexit and Trump are dismissed now.

The other article [Why Elites always Rule](#) took me back to my university days in the early 1960s when I first encountered (and was impressed by) the work of the [elite theorists](#) Robert Michels, Mosca and Pareto; and of other central Europeans such as Schumpeter (of "circulation of the elites" fame) who had been writing a few decades earlier - on the central issue of how the masses might be controlled in an age of democracy.....

I also remember Elias Canetti's [Crowds and Power](#) making a big impact on me when its English translation was published in 1962.

By the 1960s, however, far from fearing the masses a lot of us in Europe and America were celebrating them - whether through the fashion for "[participation](#)" let alone [community action](#), direct action or [community development](#)

Major political and economic events in the 1970s punctured that optimism and ushered in a celebration not of mutuality but of egocentricity, greed and commodification. Adam Curtis' [The Century of the Self](#) captures the process superbly.....

Each section in the 2 tables here represents a decade - starting with the 1930s - with what I take to have been the key themes eg "deindustrialisation" is the first of the themes of the 1980s..

I don't like conspiracy theories but it does seem fairly clear now that a lot of very big money started in the late 1940s to fund a large number of new think-tanks devoted to pushing this new neo-liberal agenda. I remember when I first encountered in the 1970s the pamphlets from the British [Institute for Economic Affairs](#). Their ideas (such as road pricing) were presented with quite ruthless elegance and were quite shocking - but had a coherent logic which allowed me to present them to my surveyor students as examples of the usefulness of economic thinking and principles...

Philip Morkowski's 2009 study [The Road from Mont Pelerin](#) is a details (in its 480 pages!) how exactly the think tanks managed to achieve this ideological turnaround and to capture most powerful international bodies such as The World Bank, The International Monetary Fund, OECD and the EC.

The Financial crash of 2008 should have been the catalyst to a rethink but, despite the valiant efforts of people such as Joseph Stiglitz and Mark Blyth, it has taken Brexit and Trump to challenge the assumptions of the neo-liberal machine.....

I don't think it helps to throw labels around - whether "populist", "racist" or "fascist". (I try not to use any word which ends in "ist" since [objecting a few years ago to being called a leftist](#))

Populist parties started to worry some people around the year 2000 - as you will see from [this academic article](#) but intellectual, political and business elites were so trapped in their bubbles that they didn't spot it coming. Jan Werner-Mueller's recent little [What is Populism?](#) is one of the few books which have so far been written about it and builds [on this earlier pamphlet](#)

We do not necessarily have to accept that "what goes around, comes around" ie that history is cyclical. But I suspect that it is a more fruitful approach than the one which has been prevailing in recent decades - namely that it's linear and takes us through innovative change to a better world.....

I was impressed that some academics have tried to remedy our myopia and have put together a Trump Syllabus with a fairly extensive reading list -

corporatism	
Deindustrialisation	
Privatisation	
Pursuit of excellence	
ecology	
decentralisation	
globalisation	
End of history	
Flexibility and reengineering	
Reinvention of government; NPM	
Climate change	
The learning organisation	
Washington consensus	
Good governance	
Neo-liberalism and its limits	
Environmental collapse	
Migration and social integration	
Migration	
financial capitalism	
austerity	
Inequality	

<http://www.chronicle.com/article/Trump-Syllabus/236824>
<http://www.publicbooks.org/trump-syllabus-2-0/>
<http://www.publicbooks.org/trump-syllabus-3-0/>

In that same spirit I offer these hyperlinks -

Key reading

[How to Build an Autocracy](#)

[Age of Kakistocracy,](#)

<http://www.nybooks.com/articles/1995/06/22/ur-fascism/>

<https://gerryco23.wordpress.com/2017/01/25/driftng-towards-great-catastrophes-premonitions-from-the-1930s/>

Others

<https://almostrational.wordpress.com/2015/12/08/read-canetti-stop-trump/>

<http://www.newstatesman.com/ideas/2011/08/crowds-power-canetti-book-eyes>

<http://www.dailykos.com/story/2016/11/14/1598974/-Listen-to-Trump-voters-Listen-to-Gessen-Eco-and-Canetti-first-learning-the-lessons-of-history>

http://www.realclearpolitics.com/articles/2017/01/31/populistauthoritarian_strains_worry_koch_network_132949.html

<http://washingtonmonthly.com/2017/01/31/the-12-early-warning-signs-of-fascism/>

<https://www.onfocus.com/2016/11/6845/anti-authoritarian-immune-system>

<https://www.opendemocracy.net/robert-borosage/trumps-perverse-populism>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Revolt_of_the_Masses

<http://pinkmonkey.com/dl/library1/revolt.pdf>

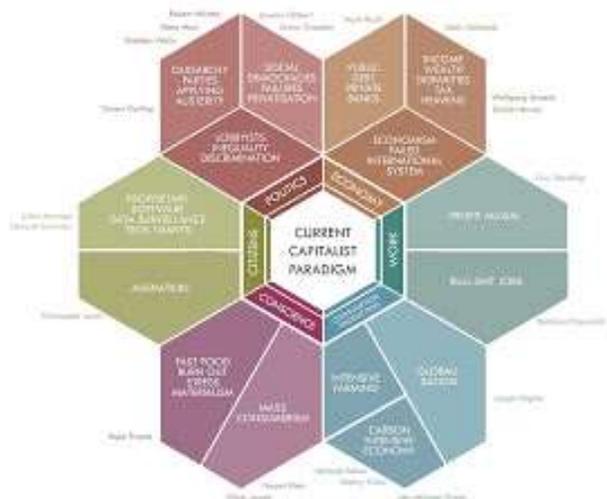
<https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/freedom-world-2017>

<http://nymag.com/daily/intelligencer/2016/04/america-tyranny-donald-trump.html>

The title of this post I now see is one quite frequently used - eg 2 contemporary books by leftists ([Seamus Milne](#) and Alex Callicos) and also of this [useful article](#)

February 6, 2017

Understanding the mess we're in



The [left-right scale](#) has a long history - the left label coming in the 20th century to designate people on the basis of their attitude to the economic role which the state should play in society. Since, however, the late 50s and the arrival of a more "self-expressive" spirit, an additional dimension was needed to indicate attitudes to the hierarchy /participation dimension (ie political power).

The [political compass website](#) - which allows you to take your own test - labels these additional dimensions "left authoritarian" and "left libertarian" Last year I came across [a couple of diagrams](#) from the Commons Transition people which I found very useful correctives to the normal

simplifications we get about what is going in the world....

It uses six dimensions - which it labels "politics", "the economy", "work", "citizens", "conscience" and "consumption" to identify a dozen key concerns which have surfaced about recent global trends. We can certainly quibble about the logic of the dimensions - and the labels used for the trends - but the diagrams are thought-provoking and worthy of more discussion than they seem to have obtained in the couple of years they have been available.

The first of the diagrams details the "[Current Capitalist Paradigm](#)" but, for my money, could be improved by adding some names of illustrative writers.

I have therefore taken the liberty of producing a [simpler version of the diagram which includes about 20 names](#) - with hyperlinks in each case to key texts. Readers who are frustrated by the tiny lettering of the names around the perimeter should therefore simply click on the link (NOT the diagram above) and then click the particular name whose material they want to access.

The second diagram is entitled [Beyond Capitalism](#) and does include illustrative names. This too could, in my view, do with some additions (and deletions) and I hope to include an amended version in a future post. For example, it is a bit light on robotisation.....

For the moment, however, let me simply offer my readers the diagrams as a better way of mapping the literature to which we should be paying attention.....

March 25

Exemplary Critics

I'm a great fan of diagrams - apart from giving us a breathing space from text, they show that the writer is aware that we all operate with [very different types of understanding](#). Even more than the act of writing itself, the process of designing a diagram will quickly throw up the flaws in your thinking.....

Six categories form the heart of the two [diagrams](#) from [the Commons Transition people](#) I referred to yesterday - I liked the selection of the worlds of "work", "citizens" and "conscience" as key categories - we all behave differently in these spheres.....and I understood the "politics" and "economy" labels - we have various assumptions and expectations in those fields....

It was the sixth category however - of "consumption/production" which utterly confused me. What exactly is it - and how does it differ from "economy" and "work"?? And why are "workers' cooperatives" not included in the "economy" category (and "social enterprise" included not there but in "work"??)

There were actually two diagrams - one purporting to illustrate the "present capitalist paradigm", the second "Beyond Capitalism" and containing illustrative names.....

The first diagram, however, was also bereft of such illustrations and I therefore offered [a simpler version of the diagram](#) which included the names of writers I considered offered useful examples of the schools indicated (with appropriate hyperlinks)....

I readily concede that the names selected probably said more about the world of an ageing (male) Brit than anything else - even so, of the 23 names selected, only five are actually English.

I do, however, have to confess that all but two are male (although I generally quote people like Susan Strange and Susan George).

Let me introduce this exemplary group - in future posts I hope to say more about those who have written critically in the past 50 odd years about the economic and political system which has us in its grip..... I start at the [top left corner of the diagram](#) with some key names in the increasingly critical debate about the health of our democracies.....

[Sheldon Wolin](#) was one of America's most distinguished political scientists - producing in 1960 one of the most lucid and inviting political textbooks "[Politics and Vision](#)" (700pp). As a student of politics between 1960-64, it was his book (and Bernard Crick's "In Defence of Politics") which inspired me to pursue politics as a vocation.....

He died in 2015 at the grand age of 93, having produced seven years earlier a withering critique of the American political system - [Democracy Incorporated - managed democracy and the spectre of inverted totalitarianism](#)

[Peter Mair](#) was a highly respected Irish political scientist who died at the height of his powers at the age of 60 and is renowned for [Ruling the Void - the hollowing of Western Democracy](#) (2013) which encapsulated the increasing despair of serious political scientists about the post 2000 trajectory of democracy.

[Robert Michels](#) started the critique a hundred years earlier with his "[Political Parties](#) - a sociological study of the oligarchical tendencies of modern democracy" first produced in German in 1911.

Jeremy Gilbert is a British academic whose [Reclaim Modernity - beyond markets; beyond machines](#) (2014) was a contribution to the ongoing debate about the future of the British Labour party

[David Graeber](#) is an American anthropologist who has written powerfully about the history of debt; about anarchism; and more recently about aspects of modern work.....

[Mark Blyth](#) is a Scottish-American political economist whose [Austerity - history of a dangerous idea](#) made a big impact when it first appeared in 2013 and even more so in his subsequent lectures...

Yanis Varfoukis is a Greek-American economist whose [The Global Minotaur - America, the true origins of the financial crisis; and the future of the world economy](#) (2011)

Wolfgang Streeck is a German sociologist who has produced a series of powerfully-written critiques of the modern economy, culminating in [How will Capitalism End?](#)

David Harvey is an English Marxist geographer who has been based in the States for the past few decades; and become famous for his courses on Marxism and capitalism. One of his most powerful books is [A Brief History of Neo Liberalism](#) (2005)

Guy Standing's claim to fame is [The Precariat - the new dangerous class](#) (2011)

[New Capitalism? The End of Work](#) (2009) by Kevin Doogan is a [surprisingly critical assessment](#) of the writing which from the mid 1980s has warned of the increasing job insecurity which lies ahead. It's worth reading for its summary of writing of this important field.

[Barbara Ehrenreich](#) is an American journalist who has famously worked undercover to bring to readers her experiences of just how grim working life can be eg "Nickel and Dimed"

Joseph Stiglitz was the World Bank's Chief Economist until his challenges of its Orthodoxy proved too much for them to bear. [Globalisation and its Discontents](#) (2002) is one of the many trenchant books he has written to expose the emptiness of economics orthodoxy....

[John Michael Greer](#) is an American writer and one of the most prominent of what might be called [the apocalypticists](#) - who consider that the western world is on a "Long (if slow) Descent" to a simpler world...I'm using the word in a respectful way since a lot of their arguments are convincing - and Greer's analysis of American politics is the most profound I've seen.

[Dmitry Orlov](#) is another such apocalypticist - a Russian engineer who came to the States in 1974 (when 12) and, on home visits, having seen the USSR collapse at first hand, has been suggesting since his [Reinventing Collapse; the Soviet Experience and American Prospects](#) (2005) that a similar fate awaits the States...

[Michael Pollan](#) is a Professor of English in the States who became famous for his writing on agro-business

[Naomi Klein](#) is a radical Canadian journalist who made an impact with her "No Logo" (1999) and "The Shock Doctrine" (2007) books about capitalism. [This Changes Everything](#) (2014)

[Oliver James](#) is a British psychologist whose various books (such as "[Affluenza](#)" 2001) reflect the concerns of a lot of people....

Pope Francis has become the remaining hope of a lot of progressives. [On Care of our Common Home](#) (2015) is an encyclical which lambasts the present economic system and doctrines...

[Christopher Lasch](#) was an American cultural analyst whose [The Culture of Narcissism](#) (1979) caught well the self-centredness of America in the post 60s period. His penetrating critiques continued with [The True and Only Heaven - progress and its critics](#) (1991) and his posthumous [The Revolt of the Elites and the Betrayal of Democracy](#) (1995)

[Edward Snowden](#) is the whistle-blower par excellence - working for a CIA sub-contractor he unearthed and spilled the story of the scale of American hacking of private accounts...

[Julian Assange](#) is an Australian computer expert, publisher and activist who has been holed up in London's Ecuador Embassy since 2102 for fear of extradition to the US for "trumped-up" charges by the Swedish authorities....

[Danny Dorling](#) is a British geographer whose [Injustice](#) (2014) rivals the moral power of [RH Tawney's](#) writing and whose [A Better Politics - how government can make us happier](#) (2016) is one of the clearest invitations to a better society

So??

Sunday, March 26, 2017

Economics – a rare example of good writing

We're so overwhelmed by the mountain of books and blogs available about economic issues that I've sought to give readers [some tests they can use on material](#) they come across - to help them more easily select the material worth spending time on.....

One of the five things I look for is **clarity of writing** - from the simple argument that confused writing is a sign of a confused mind. Authors who rely on abstract language have allowed the language to take over their thinking.

A second thing I look for are signs that the author is able and willing to classify other specialists according to the different perspectives they bring - and generous in his attributions...

I've just come across an excellent example of what I mean - from the Michael Robert's blog [The Next Recession](#) who starts his latest post with a great name-check on the Keynesian economists who dominate leftist discussions there days -

Keynes is the economic hero of those wanting to change the world; to end poverty, inequality and continual losses of incomes and jobs in recurrent crises. And yet anybody who has read [the posts on my blog](#) knows that [Keynesian economic analysis is faulty](#), empirically doubtful and its policy prescriptions to right the wrongs of capitalism have proved to be failures.

In the US, the great gurus of opposition to the neoliberal theories of Chicago school of economics and the policies of Republican politicians are Keynesians [Paul Krugman](#), Larry Summers and [Joseph Stiglitz](#) or slightly more radical Dean Baker or James Galbraith. In the UK, the leftist leaders of the Labour party around Jeremy Corbyn and John McDonnell, self-proclaimed socialists, look to Keynesian economists like Martin Wolf, Ann Pettifor or Simon Wren Lewis for their policy ideas and analysis. They bring them onto their advisory councils and seminars. In Europe, the likes of [Thomas Piketty](#) rule.

Those graduate students and lecturers involved in [Rethinking Economics](#), an international attempt to change the teaching and [ideas away from neoclassical theory](#), are led by Keynesian authors like James Kwak or post-Keynesians like Steve Keen, or Victoria Chick or Frances Coppola. Kwak, for example, has a new book called *Economism*, which argues that the economic faultline in capitalism is rising inequality and the failure of mainstream economics is in not recognising this. Again the idea that inequality is the enemy, not capitalism as such, exudes from the Keynesians and post-Keynesians like Stiglitz, Kwak, Piketty or [Stockhammer](#), and dominates the media and the labour movement. This is not to deny the [ugly importance of rising inequality](#), but to show that a Marxist view of this does not circulate.

Indeed, when the media wants to be daring and radical, publicity is heaped on new books from Keynesians or post-Keynesian authors, but not Marxists. For example, Ann Pettifor of Prime Economics has written a new book, [The Production of Money](#), in which she tells us that "money is nothing more than a promise to pay" and that as "we're creating money all the time by making these promises", money is infinite and not limited in its production, so society can print as much of it as it likes in order to invest in its social choices without any detrimental economic consequences. And through the Keynesian multiplier effect, incomes and jobs can expand. And "it makes no difference where the government invests its money, if doing so creates employment". The only issue is to keep the cost of money, interest rates as low as possible, to ensure the expansion of money (or is it credit?) to drive the capitalist economy forward. Thus there is no need for any change in the mode

of production for profit, just take control of the money machine to ensure an infinite flow of money and all will be well.

Ironically, at the same time, leading post-Keynesian Steve Keen gets ready to deliver [a new book](#) advocating the [control of debt or credit as the way to avoid crises](#). Take your pick: more credit money or less credit. Either way, the Keynesians drive the economic narrative with an analysis that reckons only the finance sector is the causal force in disrupting capitalism.

So why, Roberts asks, do Keynesian ideas continue to dominate? Here he brings in **Geoff Mann** - director of the Centre for Global Political Economy at Simon Fraser University, Canada and his new book, entitled [In the Long Run We are all Dead](#) which argues that Keynes rules .

.....because he offers a third way between socialist revolution and barbarism, i.e. the end of civilisation as we (actually the bourgeois like Keynes) know it. In the 1920s and 1930s, Keynes feared that the 'civilised world' faced Marxist revolution or fascist dictatorship. But socialism as an alternative to the capitalism of the Great Depression could well bring down 'civilisation', delivering instead 'barbarism' - the end of a better world, the collapse of technology and the rule of law, more wars etc.

So he aimed to offer the hope that, through some modest fixing of 'liberal capitalism', it would be possible to make capitalism work without the need for socialist revolution. There would no need to go where the angels of 'civilisation' fear to tread. That was the Keynesian narrative.

This appealed (and still appeals) to the leaders of the labour movement and 'liberals' wanting change. Revolution was risky and we could all go down with it. Mann: "the Left wants democracy without populism, it wants transformational politics without the risks of transformation; it wants revolution without revolutionaries". (p21).

Those wanting more detail can read this well-written paper (20 pp) by Mann entitled "[Keynes Resurrected?](#)" (2013) as well as his [critique of Thomas Pikety](#)

28 March

Mood Music - How the intellectuals have made sense of our economic system

In the decade after the 1929 Great Crash, capitalism had been in such deep trouble that [its very legitimacy](#) was being questioned. Almost 90 years on, we seem to be back in the same place...

The destruction wrought by the Second World War, however, supplied a huge boost to European economies - supplemented by the distributive effort of [Marshall Aid](#) and the new role of global agencies such as The World Bank and the IMF - let alone the role of American Capital... ..

In Europe, Governments replaced key private monopolies with public ownership and regulation; and earned legitimacy with social provision and full employment. The "mixed economy" that resulted brought the power of unions and citizens into a sort of balance with that of capital.

By the mid 50s, therefore, Labour politician CAR Crosland's seminal [The Future of Socialism](#) could argue to some effect that managerial power was more important than ownership - an analysis with which economic journalist Andrew Shonfield's original and detailed exploration of European [Modern Capitalism - the changing balance of public and private power](#) (1966) concurred. And which was already evident in the 1959 German SDP's [Bad Godesburg programme](#).

And, by 1964, the British PM Harold McMillan expressed the ebullient European mood when he used the phrase "you've never had it so good" - the growth of the core European economic countries being one of the factors which encouraged the UK's membership of the Common Market in 1973 - although even then there were voices such as that of EJ Mishan warning of [The Costs of Economic Growth](#) (1967) and of... The [Limits to Growth](#) (Club of Rome 1972).

[Daniel Bell](#) was another important voice questioning the brash confidence of the post-war period - with his [Coming of Post-industrial Society](#) (1971) and [Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism](#) (1976)

But most people by then were convinced that governments, science and big business had found the answers to the problems which had plagued the 20th century. The [ending of American dollar convertibility \(to gold\)](#) and the first oil crisis of the early 1970s may have led to first questions about the "[overload](#)" of [state capacity](#) - but privatization seemed to give the economy new energy if not a new [era of greed](#). And the early 1970s also saw the American Democrats sever their link to the proud Populist tradition

James Robertson's [The Sane Alternative - a choice of futures](#) (1978) may have been the last voice of sanity before Thatcher took over.....(ditto in the US the Hermann Daly book)

There's a [nice little video here](#) of Charles Handy reminding us of the discussions in which he participated in the 1970s about the purpose of the company - and the casual way people such as Milton Friedmann and his acolytes introduced the idea of senior managers being given "share options" as incentives. Handy regrets the failure of people then to challenge what has now become the biggest element of the scandal of the gross inequalities which disfigure our societies in the 21st century.

The 1980s and 1990s was a celebration of a new spirit with even social critics apparently conceding the irresistibility of the social and technical change taking place - Charles Handy's "[The Future of Work](#)" (1984); James Robertson's [Future Work - jobs, self-employment and measure after the](#)

[industrial age](#) (1985); [Casino Capitalism](#) by International Relations scholar, Susan Strange (1986); [The End of Organised Capitalism by sociologists](#) Scott Lash, John Ury (1987) and the columns of [Marxism Today - the journal](#) expressed the mood.

One of the latter's contributors, Andrew Gamble (a Politics Professor), wrote the most clear and prescient analyses of the key forces - [The Free Economy and the Strong State - the politics of Thatcherism](#) (1988). It's taken 25 years for the power of that analysis to be properly appreciated... [For the Common Good](#); Herman Daly and John Cobb (1989) gave us a sense of how things could be organized differently....

Then came the fall of communism - and triumphalism. Hayek (and Popper) were wheeled out to inspire central European intellectuals - I encountered so many well-thumbed copies of the former's (translated) [Road to Serfdom](#) (written during the second world war) as I travelled around Central Europe in the 1990s on my various projects

But, by the mid-90s, the shine was going off the unexpected western victory... .. and a deluge not only of critiques but of alternative visions began to hit us.....

I can't pretend this is exhaustive - but these are some of the titles which caught my eye over the decade before the global crisis of 2008....

- "[Everything for Sale](#) - the virtues and limits of markets" - Robert Kuttner (1996)

- [Short Circuit](#) - strengthening local economies in an unstable world" - Ronald Douthwaite (1996). Very practical - but also inspirational....21 years on, it hasn't really been bettered

- [Natural Capitalism - the next industrial revolution](#); Paul Hawken (1999). A persuasive vision of how green technology could revitalize capitalism....

- [The cancer stages of capitalism](#); John Mc Murtry (1999). A much darker vision.....

- "[The Lugano Report](#): On Preserving Capitalism in the Twenty-first Century" - Susan George (1999). A satirical piece which forces us to think where present forces are taking us....

- [The Great Disruption - human nature and the reconstitution of social order](#); Francis Fukuyama (1999) An important book which passed me by until 2017 - it is a critique of the loosening of our social fabric since 1965.....

- [Economics and Utopia - why the learning economy is not the end of history](#); Geoff Hodgson (1999) a clear and tough analysis by a top-class economic historian of why socialism lost its way - and exploration of what it will take for it to restore its energies. If you want to get a sense of the range of arguments which have convulsed economists and activists over the past century, this is the book for you).

- [CyberMarx - cycles and circuits of struggle in high technology capitalism](#); Nick Dyer-Witheford (1999). It may be a PhD thesis - but it's a great read.....

- [The New Spirit of Capitalism](#); L Boltanski and E Chiapello (1999). Surprising that others have not attempted this critical analysis of managerial texts since they tell us so much about the Zeitgeist.....these are mainly French (and a bit turgid)....The only similar analyses I know are a couple of treatments of managerial gurus by Brits (one with a Polish name!)....
- [Capitalism and its Economics - a critical History](#); Douglas Dowd (2000) Very readable bit of economic history - from the 18th century
- [Anti-capitalism - theory and practice](#); Chris Harman (2000) A Trotskyist take....
- [Globalisation and its Discontents; Joseph Stiglitz](#) (2002) is probably the best on the subject - exposing the emptiness of economics orthodoxy....
- "[We are Everywhere](#) - a celebration of community enterprise" (2003)
- [Another world is possible](#) Susan George (2004) - one of the great critical analysts of global capitalism
- [Why Globalisation Works](#); Martin Wolf (2004) - one of its most powerful defenders
- [A Brief History of Neo-Liberalism](#) - David Harvey (2005). One of the world's experts in Marxist economics - so a bit heavy going.....
- [Knowing Capitalism](#); Nigel Thrift (2005) A geographer turned turgid post-structuralist, this book requires considerable perseverance - with some doubts as to whether it's worth it!
- [Models of Capitalism](#); Colin Crouch (2005).... It was in the 1990s when the full extent of the [variety of different capitalisms](#) was properly appreciated
- [Capitalism 3.0](#) (2006) by Peter Barnes - a very fair-minded entrepreneur sensitive to the evils of unregulated capitalism...
- [The Culture of the new capitalism; Richard Sennett](#) (2006). Sennett remains one of the few intellectuals capable of matching Bell in the lucidity of their exposition (and breadth of reading) about social trends.....
- Olin Wright's [Envisioning Real Utopias](#) (2007) which instances the amazing Mondragon cooperatives but is otherwise an incestuous academic scribble.
- [Theorising Neoliberalism](#); Chris Harman (2007) Strong analysis from a Trot....
- [New Capitalism? - the transformation of work](#); K Doogan (2009) A good academic take.....

And that's all before the crash
30 March

Sketches for a Future World

I am, of course, well aware that thousands of books have been written about the global crisis - but almost all have one simple defect - they attribute blame to **other people**.

I start, instead, from the spirit which infused a 1978 book called "The Seventh Enemy" (by R Higgins) which listed 6 global enemies- then seen as "the food crisis"; the "population explosion"; scarcity; environmental degradation; nuclear threat; and scientific technology.

The seventh enemy was....ourselves....our moral blindness and political inertia.....

Another such rare book is Danny Dorling's hugely underrated [Injustice](#) (2011) which identified 5 "social evils" - elitism, exclusion, prejudice, greed and despair - and [explores the myths which sustain them](#). Unusually, the argument is that we are all guilty of these evils and of sustaining these myths.....

There is a further problem about the literature about the global crisis - which is that a lot of it identifies the problem as the financial bubble which exploded ten years ago and fails to do justice to other issue and to the [other voices which were issuing strong warnings](#) from the 1970s.....It's only in the past year that people have been realizing that this crisis is deeper and goes back longer.....

The book at the moment has an odd structure - since it's made up of posts I'd written which had been triggered by my reading of the past decade.....and, as I've got deeper into the editing process, I've realized that I need to be more disciplined in the selection of key texts which have shaped "our thinking" over the past 60 years... ..

And, in this, I've been helped by [these two diagrams from the Commons in Transition](#) people - one called the "Current Capitalism Paradigm", the second "Beyond Capitalism". Last week I presented [an improved version of the first diagram](#) which contained hyperlinks to authors who gave good analyses of the various problems identified about the current capitalism paradigm....and [a later post gave additional detail](#) on these important writers

Now it is time to look at some of the key texts which appeared after the crisis but after it had sunk in that this crisis was not going away.

Of course, any such list is highly arbitrary - I have tried to offer an all-too-brief justification for most of the choices

[The Enigma of Capital](#); David Harvey (2010) Puts the crisis in proper historical and economic context although a bit too technical for my taste..

[Humanising the Economy; John Restakis \(2010\) An excellent treatment of a more cooperative vision](#)

[The Global Minotaur - America, the true origins of the financial crisis and the future of the world economy](#); Yanis Varoufakis (2011) One of the few economists on the list and, quite simply, the best on the subject....click the title and you get the entire book!!

[The Strange Non-Death of NeoLiberalism](#); Colin Crouch (2011) The first of a wave of books to explore why, far from dying, neoliberalism was even stronger...Crouch is a political scientist but not the easiest of reads.

[Injustice - why social inequality persists](#) - David Dorling (2011) Quite excellent (see opening para above) treatment from a prolific geographer

[The Future of Work - what it means for individuals, markets, businesses and governments](#); David Bollier (2011) A good sound treatment by someone prominent in the P2P movement

[Beyond the Corporation; David Erdal \(2011\) Inspiring story of an entrepreneur who passed his business to the workers..](#)

[Misrule of Experts? The Financial Crisis as Elite Debacle](#) M Moran et al (2011) a rare essay which goes beyond the common explanation of the crisis as accident, conspiracy or calculative failure and **frames** the crisis differently as an elite political debacle

[The Capitalism Papers - Fatal Flaws of an Obsolete System](#); Jerry Mander (2012). Highly readable analysis from a great American journalist

[Debt and Neo-Feudalism](#); Michael Hudson (2012) - one of a series of papers where this prominent and radical economist spells out his view of financial capitalism - which can also be [found in his blog](#). A joint article on the [rentier aspect of the crisis](#) is here...Also have a look at this 2012 discussion - [how finance capitalism leads to debt servitude](#)

[Owning our Future - the emerging ownership revolution](#); Marjorie Kelly (2012) Another excellent text on the cooperative approach

[New Spirits of capitalism? Crises, justifications and dynamics; ed](#) Paul du Gay, Glenn Morgan (2013) This book is a collection of papers from organizational and management theorists who analyse the 1999 book by French theorists..

[Austerity - the history of a dangerous idea](#); Mark Blyth (2013) A political economy treatment - and surpasses and updates Varoufakis.

[Buying Time - the delayed crisis of democratic capitalism; Wolfgang Streeck](#) (2013) Highly readable critique from a German sociologist

[Cooperative enterprise building in a better world; Terry McDonald \(2013\). Sorry if I'm overdoing this subject - but it is so important and so neglected in discussion...](#)

[Perfect Storm](#); Tim Morgan (2013). A good treatment by an international consultant

[Does Capitalism have a Future?](#) Immanuel Wallerstein, Michael Mann, Craig Calhoun (2013) I came across this very recently....I'm not sure if I missed much - but with such a title and set of authors, it has to be listed

[End of capitalism?](#) Michael Mann (2013) Substantial academic essay from a historical sociologist - and good summary of what the author contributed to the previous book

[Take Back the Economy - an ethical guide for transforming our communities](#); J Gibson-Graham, Jenny Cameron and Stephen Healy (2013) Very readable localist approach

[Democratic Wealth](#) (2014) - being a little E-book of Cambridge and Oxford University bloggers' takes on the crisis

[Rebalancing Society - radical renewal beyond left, right and center](#); Henry Mintzberg (2014) who is my favourite management guru - for the bluntness of his writing...In a famous 2000 HBR article he warned that 1989 and other socio-economic changes were creating a dangerous imbalance.

Seventeen Contradictions and the End of Capitalism; David Harvey (2014). Book can be downloaded - anything from this Marxist geographer is worthy of note

[Civic Capitalism](#) (2014) a short paper from the interesting SPERI unit at Sheffield University

[Renewing Public Ownership](#) - making space for a democratic economy (2014) [reviewed here](#)

[Crisis without End - the unravelling of western prosperity](#); Andrew Gamble (2014). A political scientist who has analysed neo-liberalism since the 1970s (google the phrase and you will be able to download a very helpful analysis he did as long ago as 1979!)

[The Limits of Neo Liberalism - authority, sovereignty and the logic of competition](#) ; William Davies (2014). A cold analysis

[The future of work](#); Jacob Morgan (2014). A useful overview - if a bit too American in its spirit!

[Reinventing Organisations](#); Frederic Laloux (2014) - a strange sort of book (which can be downloaded in full from the link) redolent of the American 1990s' style of [Peter Senge et al](#) who promised a more liberating type of organization.

[Shifts and Shocks - what we've learned, and still have to, from the financial crisis](#); Martin Wolf (2014) - with accompanying [power point presentation. Although](#) Wolf was an apologist for globalization, he is as clear and objective economist as that breed is capable of producing..

[Laudato-Si](#) - the Papal Encyclical (2015). A summary is [available here](#). Its entire 184 pages [can be read here](#)

[Rise of the Robots](#); Martin Ford (2015). I'm told this is one of the key writers on this fashionable topic

[Sociology, Capitalism, Critique](#); Dora, Lessenich and Rosa (2015 - translated from 2009 German original). My posts are, of necessity, too anglo-saxon so I am delighted to include this reference.

[A New Alignment of Movements?](#) D Bollier (2015) How the thinking of the "platform commons" people has moved on since 2011

[The Butterfly Defect - how globalization creates systemic risks and what to do about it;](#) **Ian Goldin and Mike Mariathasan (2015)** I actually don't know anything about this book but the theme is an important one

[Change Everything - creating an Economy for the Common Good;](#) Christian Felber (2015 English - 2010 German). I'm not impressed with this book at all - too simplistic and doesn't reference the relevant literature but it seems to have encouraged some European groups.....

[Commons Transition](#) (2015) a curious book from the Commons in Transition people which is frankly a bit of a scissors and paste job from various projects including one in Ecuador....

[Post Capitalism - a guide to our Future;](#) Paul Mason (2015) a best-seller but bit of a curate's egg [whose basic thesis is spelled out here](#)....

[Inventing the Future - Postcapitalism and a world without work;](#) **N Srnicek and Williams** (2015) - sociologists . You can [read it for yourself in full here and take in a good review of both above books here. Also a best-seller](#)....

[Cyberproletariat - global labour in the digital vortex;](#) Nick Dyer-Witford (2015) Thought provoking book from a Canadian media/political economy academic

[The Next System Report - political possibilities for the 21st Century](#) (2015) The opening essay from a fascinating American project whose latest output is this [great series of papers](#)

[Vampire Capitalism - fractured societies and alternative futures;](#) Paul Kennedy (2017)
A sociologist's treatment which earns high points by stating in the very first sentence that it has "stood on the shoulders of so many giants that he is dizzy" and then proves the point by having an extensive bibliography with lots of hyperlinks...but the price is just stupid! It is very well written and, if the paperback price is reasonable, promises to be my recommended read.....

<https://www.scribd.com/document/336342198/Vampire-Capitalism-Fractured-Societies-and-Alternative-Futures-by-Paul-Kennedy>

8 April

Thinking Beyond Capitalism

Readers who want to know more about the illustrative names at the perimeter of the diagram which graces this post need [to click here for an interactive version of my amended version of Beyond Capitalism](#)



The normal caveats prevail - namely that I owe the basic structure of 6 dimensions and 15 boxes to [the Commons in Transition](#) people; that the simplified text and indicative names are my personal responsibility; and that I am well aware of the limitations of these last two.... Having said that, let me offer an initial commentary on some aspects of the six dimensions

1. The POLITICS Dimension (Democracy and the Commons)

As representative democracy has eroded in recent decades, direct democracy has attracted increasing attention - eg [referenda](#), citizens' juries, participatory budgeting or random selection of electoral positions. There is no obvious name to offer - although John Keane's huge book on [The Life and Death of Democracy](#) is one of the best resources.

[Paul Hirst](#) advanced the idea of "[associative democracy](#)" until his sad death in 2003. This drew on the thinking of figures such as GDH Cole...

As the internet has developed, so has the principle of "The Commons" of which [Elinor Ostrom and Michael Bauwien](#) are key figures....

2. The ECONOMY (or Finance??) Dimension

actually reads to me more like the International Finance Regime - with a concession made to the importance of local banking but **the normal economic world of production and other services missing**. The [North Dakota State Bank](#) is one example of the wider concept of local banking. [David Graeber](#); [Thomas Pikety](#); [Joseph Stiglitz](#); and [Yanis Varoufakis](#) are just a few of the most important writers on the issue of debt and capital

3. The WORK/ECONOMY Dimension

It is here I have my most fundamental questions about the classification - since the original diagram gives only one phrase ("enterprise- social and responsible") for what is arguably the engine of the economy AND places this in the "Work" box - rather than the "economy" one....

- [Robert Owen](#); [Mondragon](#); and [Ronald Douthwaite](#) are examples of those who have inspired global cooperative endeavours which account for far more jobs than people realize - about a quarter of jobs globally. With the appropriate tax regimes, that could be much more...
- Even so, privately-owned companies have a critical role - as recognized by Paul Hawken in [Natural Capitalism - the next industrial revolution](#) and Peter Barnes in [Capitalism 3.0](#)
- [CASSE \(advocating the "steady state economy"\)](#) should be transferred to this box.....
- The original diagram also failed to mention robotisation which has been the subject of much discussion recently such [as here](#) and [here](#). [Martin Ford](#) is probably the key writer at the moment on the issue - perhaps also [Jeremy Rifkin](#)

4. The 4th Dimension

Here again, I'm uncomfortable with the designation originally given to this box - "consumption/production". It seems to me to cover at the moment the field of self-sufficiency (??) as propounded by people such as [John Michael Greer and Dmitry Orlov](#) - the latter in his [Reinventing Collapse; the Soviet Experience and American Prospects](#) - or the Resilience magazine

5. The CONSCIENCE Dimension

Robert Quinn's [Change the World](#) is, for my money, the most persuasive tract - despite its off-putting (and very American) sub-title "how ordinary people can accomplish extraordinary results". And, despite the cynicism he has attracted, Stephen Covey's [The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People](#) is actually a very worthwhile read....If these are too "exhortatory" for readers, you may want to look at [Character Strengths and Virtues](#) by Martin Seligman

Danah Zohar's [Spiritual Capital - wealth we can live by](#) (2004) is an interesting critique of capitalism with a rather too superficial approach to its amelioration. [The Ethical Economy - rebuilding value after the crisis](#) by A Arvidsson and N Peitersen (2013) covers the ground better - it's summarized [here](#) and critiqued [here](#).

A fascinating and totally neglected book is [Questions of Business Life](#) by Richard Higginson (2002) which is what a cleric produced from his work at an ecumenical centre for business people....

6. The CITIZENS Dimension

The internet attracts great hopes - and fears. On balance, people are persuaded of its net benefits to democracy - although the high hopes of various "springs" and movements have been bitterly

disappointed. Writers such as Paul Hawken and Paul Kingsnorth have written powerfully about these experiences...

[Yochai Benkler](#) is a new name for me. A legal scholar, he has written profusely about the limits and potential of the open source technology which leads us back to platform democracy and cooperatives....

9 April 2017

The last line of the previous post mentioned a little book - [Journey to Earthland](#) - which puts all the sound and fury in proper perspective. It is one of these rare books which impresses from the start - with a powerful, extended metaphor of the train-wreck of a journey the world is on - with the various passenger reactions categorized into those of "denial, distraction and despair".

The author is founder (some 20 years ago) of a small institute which "conducts studies and simulations to illuminate global challenges and possibilities; and summarized its insights in a 2002 essay [Great Transition; the promise and lure of the times ahead](#) which set "a broad historical, conceptual, and strategic framework for contemplating the global future". Its wider [aims can be read here](#) - and some of those associated with [it profiled here](#).

One strand of its thinking can be read in this pamphlet - [The Homebrew Industrial Revolution](#) (2010); a very [short video seen here](#); as well [as this presentation](#).

The author of the new booklet is Paul Raskin and he sets out 3 fundamental scenarios -

- **Conventional worlds** (market forces; policy tinkering)
- **Barbarization** (Fortress World; Breakdown and dystopia)
- **Great transformations** (Eco-communalism; New paradigm)

Readers will know that I am not, these days, easily impressed by books on these subjects.....

But this one impacts on all sorts of levels - the tautness of its language; the clarity of the various schemas it presents; the imaginative use it makes of sketches of the future and "retrospective stories"; and its brevity - just 110 pages.

The one criticism I have is the usual one - that it lacks a "further reading" section with a clear structure which pays attention to the various "schools of thinking"; and has, ideally, a short explanation of the reason for each book's selection...As it stands the booklet refers almost exclusively to the Institute's own writers

24 April

The Solidarity Economy

Some weeks back I shared [an excellent couple of diagrams](#) about the ills of our present socio-economic system and [how it might be changed](#).

I had some issues with aspects of the presentation and **have just come across this diagram** which, for me, offers a clearer outline of the features of a better system - one called [a "solidarity economy"](#). Yes I realise that you can't read the small print!

For that, just click the diagram.

The author has a short paper which superbly situates the concept in the wider context of [an emerging global movement of the past two decades](#) in which even yours truly became involved as far back as 1978 - when I launched a community-based project designed to help the long-term unemployed access jobs which would contribute missing local services in poor areas. Within a decade, it had become a well-resourced Community Business in the West of Scotland - part of a wider [social enterprise effort](#) within Scotland and Europe which continues to this day. My effort at making sense of this concept can be seen at p 124 of [In Transit - some notes on Good Governance](#) (1999). Interesting to compare it with the amazing richness of the diagram which adorns this post!

The Commons

It is some months ago that I mentioned that I first mentioned [the P2P Foundation](#) which sends me at least a couple of interesting posts daily eg [here](#) and [here](#)

Their posts have also made me aware of the potential of what they call "platform cooperativism" about which I have some reservations - which are well reflected in another of their

posts <https://lasindias.blog/platform-cooperativism-a-truncated-cooperativism-for-millennials>

One of the problems I have is their language - and the feeling that they are unaware of the wider experience of "mutuality" expressed in the work, for example, of Paul [Hirst](#).

But they have led me on to other interesting sites such as [Commons Transition](#) (eg <http://commonstransition.org/from-platform-to-open-cooperativism>) and [On the Commons](#) from which I retrieved a fascinating booklet [Celebrating the Commons](#) (71pp)

David Bollier is one of the key names and has a book - [Wealth of the Commons](#) which gives good insights.....

[Grassroots Economic Organising](#) (GEO) is another good site from which I got yesterday's diagram and article about solidarity economics and which has a nice [explanation of the commons movement](#)

[Share the World's Resources](#) is another relevant site which offers offerings such as this -

<http://www.sharing.org/information-centre/reports/primer-global-economic-sharing>

A lot of material relating to "the commons", however, delicately tiptoes round the topic of "common ownership" - see this excellent overview [The Commons as a new/old paradigm for governance](#) - with a [second section here](#)

But I think I have to revise my opinion about writers not standing on the shoulders of giants...

17 May 2017

About the author

Ronald Young lived the first 48 years of his life in the West of Scotland - 20 of them as an aspiring academic and innovative politician in local, then Regional, Government.

The last 25 years have been spent as a consultant in central Europe and central Asia - generally leading small teams in institutional development or training projects.

Since summer 2007 he has divided his time between a flat in Sofia, a flat in Bucharest and a house in the Carpathian mountains.

In 2009 he started a website which contains the major papers he has written over the years about his attempts to reform various public organisations in the various roles he has had - politician; academic/trainer; consultant.

"Most of the writing in my field is done by academics - and gives little help to individuals who are struggling to survive in or change public bureaucracies. Or else it is propoganda drafted by consultants and officials trying to talk up their reforms. And most of it covers work at a national level - whereas most of the worthwhile effort is at a more local level.

The restless search for the new dishonours the work we have done in the past. As Zeldin once said - "To have a new vision of the future it is first necessary to have new vision of the past"

He started a blog - called [Balkan and Carpathian Musings](#) - initially to try to make sense of the organisational endeavours he has been involved in - to see if there are any lessons which can be passed on; and to restore a bit of institutional memory and social history - particularly in the field of what used to be known as "social justice".

"My generation believed that political activity could improve things - that belief is now dead and that cynicism threatens civilisation. I also read a lot and wanted to pass on the results of this to those who have neither the time nor inclination - as well as my love of painting, particularly the realist 20th century schools of Bulgaria and Belgium".

He now has a new website - [Mapping the Common Ground](#) - which is a library for articles and books he considers useful for those who - like Brecht - feel that "So ist die Welt - und muss nicht so sein"!

LIST OF Author's PUBLICATIONS

[Dispatches to the post-capitalist generation](#) March 2017

[No Man's Land - journeys across disputed territories](#)
(2018)

[Common Endeavour? - the 2017 posts](#)

[The Bulgarian Realists - updated edition](#)

[Introducing the Romanian Realists of the 19th and early
20th Centuries](#)

[Mapping Romania - notes on an unfinished journey \(2014\)](#)

[Introducing the Bulgarian Realists - how to get to know the Bulgarians through their paintings \(2012\)](#)

[The Search for the Holy Grail - some reflections on 40 years of trying to make government and its
systems work for people 2012](#)

[Just Words](#) - a glossary and bibliography for the fight against the pretensions and perversities of
power (2012)

[A Draft Guide for the Perplexed \(2011\)](#)

[The Long Game - not the log-frame; \(2011\)](#)

[Administrative Reform with Chinese Characteristics \(2010\)](#)

[Training that works! How do we build training systems which actually improve the performance of
state bodies?](#) (2010) Even altho I say it myself - it is one of the best papers on the subject

[Learning from Experience - a Bulgarian project \(2009\)](#)

[Building Municipal Capacity \(2007\)](#) an interesting account of an intellectual journey

[Roadmap for Local Government in Kyrgyzstan \(2007\)](#) this is a long doc (117 pages. I enjoyed pulling
out this metaphor - and developing using (in workshops) the diagram at pages 76-77

[Building Local Government in a Hostile Climate \(2006\)](#)

[Overview of PAR in transition countries \(2006\)](#) This is the paper I drafted for the European
Agency for Reconstruction after the staff retreat the EAR Director invited me to speak at in June
2006 in Skopje, Macedonia. The best papers are always written after the event!



Transfer of Functions - European experiences 1970-2000 I learned a lot as I drafted this paper for my Uzbek colleagues. I haven't seen this sort of typology before.

Case Study in Organisational Development and Political Amnesia (1999)

In Transit - Part One (1999) The first section of the book I wrote for young Central European reformers. I find it stands up pretty well to the test of time

Annotated Bibliography for change agents - For quite a few years I had the habit of keeping notes the books I was reading. Perhaps they will be useful to others?