

DISPATCHES TO THE NEXT GENERATION

- Short version



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

Ronald G Young

May 2019

The author does not pretend to be an economist - although he lectured in that capacity in the early 1970s before he saw the error of his ways.

Nor is it easy to pin a political label on him - although he did spend 22 years of his life as a Labour councillor with responsibilities for devising and managing unique strategies for opening up the policy process and for developing social enterprise in Europe's largest local authority.

The subsequent 25 years he spent as an adviser on institutional development to ministries in central Europe and Central Asia.

My claim for the reader's attention is simply expressed -

- experience in an unusual variety of sectors (and countries)
- the compulsion (engrained after 50 years) to record what I felt were the lessons of each experience in short papers
- extensive reading - across disciplines
- A "voice" which has been honed by the necessity of speaking clearly to audiences of different nationalities and class
- intensive trawling of the internet for wide range of writing
- notes kept of the most important of those readings
- shared in hyperlinks with readers

The book is a taster for the longer - [Dispatches to the \(post-capitalist?\) future generation](#) (March 2018)

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

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

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 ecology decentralisation globalisation	Blackaby; Dyson Consultancies; World Bank 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 Casse
Present	migration Populism AI, robots, future of work	Werner-Mueller

DISPATCHES....

Introduction - Candide Sets Sail

Part I - in which

- An indictment is read
- 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

Part II Ruminations

- Why do so many books put us off?
- Why Do Different academic disciplines have a different take on the issue?
- Exemplary Critics
- Economics - a rare example of good writing
- Mood Music

Part III Sketches for a Future World

- Thinking Beyond capitalism
- Small is still Beautiful
- There is another way
- The solidarity economy; and the Commons
- In Praise of political economy
- Post-Capitalism has arrived?
- The solidarity economy

Part IV

How will it all end

I have a little list

Inconclusion - this too shall pass?

Annexes

Key Books of the last century

"Just Words" - a sceptic's glossary

About the author

Other reading

Ronald G Young

Introduction – Candide Sets Sail

Smuggler

Watch him when he opens
His bulging words – justice
Fraternity, freedom, internationalism, peace,
peace, peace. Make it your custom
to pay no heed
to his frank look, his visa, his stamps
and signatures. Make it
your duty to spread out their contents
in a clear light

Nobody with such language
Has nothing to declare

Norman MacCaig

I thought it would be useful to try to write a blurb for this book – on the basis that it might give me a checklist against which I could check whether the text actually fulfilled its promises – or what I thought the book should cover.....

*"This is a book", I started "about the ways we have tried to **think about the economic crisis which has gripped us over the past decade**".....I paused to look at the words...."Hang on! That's not true" I said to myself..."It's a book about how I have tried to think about the crisis".*

The royal "we" on these occasions tends to creep in unconsciously – perhaps to protect us against accusations of subjectivity, perhaps to add a suitable air of "gravitas", abstraction and authority.

I must have forgotten that, when I first compiled this short version a couple of years ago, I had chosen the title quite deliberately to convey the sense that the book would indeed try to strike a more "personal" note or "tone" than is normal for such subjects.

I was trying, after all, to gather my thoughts together "as if" I was leaving a letter behind for my children...In such an endeavour, I was following the lead of people like [Ernest Callenbach who had left behind such a letter](#) – or even [Alain Touraine](#) or [Yanis Varoufakis](#) who had penned highly personal books inspired by the thought of loved ones....

Voltaire's [Candide](#) has always attracted me – the story of an innocent who believed in the optimistic philosophy of the time as practised by one of the novel's main characters Professor Pangloss who preached that "everything is for the best in the best of possible times". I too was born in propitious times and circumstances.

I may have shown a rebellious streak in becoming a Labour activist while still in my teens – but my world view celebrated [incrementalism](#) and [Popper](#). Whatever the attractions of the New Left and [community activist writings](#) of the late 60s, I was a decade later actively

using the machinery of the local State to try to build new structures for local empowerment. And had few sympathies for the Bennites and others who were moving the Labour party leftwards.....Indeed I was so discouraged by this (and the anti-EU stance of the 1983 election manifesto) that I pulled out of candidatures for euro and parliamentary elections at the time.

It was almost 20 years ago when I first sensed the world was "out of kilter" and started to think about how those of us disgusted by the behaviour of corporate and political elites might help nudge the systems of which we are part to a more hopeful future?

This was explored in a [draft Guide for the Perplexed](#) which was written in 2000 before the global economic crisis began to unravel the post-war world - with additional sections added in the years which followed. It focused on the following questions -

- why I was pessimistic about the future and so unhappy with the activities of the programmes and organisations with which I dealt - and with what the French have called La Pensee Unique, the post 1989 "Washington consensus"
- which were the organisations and people I admired?
- what they were achieving - and what not?
- how these gaps could be reduced?
- what people like me could do about it?

I'm sure I'm not alone in the growing impatience I feel with the glibness of the writing about the economic crisis and **the absence of any real attempt to establish a common agenda - let alone a deeper sense of history.**

Every now and again my blogposts would bemoan the lack of an annotated bibliography on the subject and the need for a typology - to help us compare and contrast the world views behind the thousands of books about the causes of the global economic crisis of 2007/08 on the market... and to try to develop a common agenda...

These books pin blame, variously, on banks, speculators and a score of other explanations - including more systemic and long-term factors going back hundreds of years.

Books on this subject are usually 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" which rarely communicate with one another.....let alone with those from other disciplines.....

This book, however, comes from a non-specialist who has belongs to no school of thinking. 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

And 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!

I do not pretend to be an economist - although I did take a Masters in Political Economy and Politics and had an initial appointment as an Economist at a Polytechnic before I switched focus to public administration. Despite my antipathy for the Economics discipline, we cannot ignore it.....although one sometimes suspects that the high priests of the discipline frame their writings in such a manner as to discourage us from trying to understand.

Part of the problem we face as non-specialists is the overwhelming volume and variety of analyses, writings, disciplines and organisations trying actively to shape our thinking about how well or badly the economy is faring. Those struggling valiantly with local initiatives often don't have the time or patience to make sense of what they often see as over-shrill or theoretical writings; while academic writers tend to be impatient with what they see as the naivety of the practitioner.

A few years back, I googled phrases such as "best sellers in the global crisis" and got [a list of 100 books](#) - but nothing to help me make a selection.

I did, however, find [this annotated list of 12](#) from someone who was writing his own book and recounted how difficult it was to get past the book buyers of the major companies, And there was a [rare annotated list of 25 "must read"](#) (mostly American) books on the crisis on an interesting website [Planning beyond Capitalism](#) - but its selection was understandably a bit light on books from other ideological stables...

[The Economy - the core project](#) probably errs too much on the side of brevity and simplicity. But [a Reading Group on economics](#) has some good reading (and viewing) material - with hyperlinks....

But most economics books are aimed at the academic world - for students or for fellow academics. **Astonishingly few are actually been written for the concerned citizen!**

Such books are, of course, more difficult to write since they require -

- a non-technical language
- a balanced approach
- which, however, sustains the interest of the reader
- the portrayal of the various schools of thought - without confusing if not frightening the reader with huge reading lists
- good story-telling skills to help the understanding of key actors and processes
- some humility and sense of history in recognising how elusive and transient "expert" insights have been
- some originality in developing some tests for the various nostra on offer

I have a simple test for whether a book on the crisis is worth buying - go the Preface/Introduction and check how many of these points are covered (award one point for each)-

- Does it say why yet another book is needed to add to the huge pile we already have?
- Does it convince you that the book has something distinctive to say?
- Is its language clear
- Does the author indicate how (s)he is going to avoid the obvious danger of adopting a patronising tone?
- Does it hint that there are different schools of thinking about the issue?
- No book can be comprehensive - does the author list what subjects (s)he has excluded?
- Is there an annotated further reading list in an annex - ie one which succeeds in persuading you that they might be worth reading?

This little book is my attempt to provide an overview of the best that seems available - written by someone with no axe to grind. Most writers of the books mentioned in these pages - by virtue not only of the position they occupy but also of their self-confidence - had adopted a position on the global crisis long before they put pen to paper.

This is not true in my case. I really am an innocent - trying like Candide (some 260 years ago) to make sense of a very confusing world.....

At this point I need to draw your attention to the table on page 3 entitled "[This too shall pass](#)". I first doodled the table at the time I was drafting the paper "Draft Guide for the Perplexed" but I didn't include it simply because at that time I didn't see the connection. I've updated the table from time to time but it's only recently I've come to appreciate its significance **namely the mistake we all make of thinking we're the "bellybutton of the universe".....hopefully I can return to this issue in the conclusion.....**

By 2014 this was the best sense I could make of the world -

- 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
- a thought system has developed 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)

We're now in 2019 - what learning in those 4 years??

What do I want the book to achieve?

I generally write for myself - to help me make sense of things.

I am not one of these natural story-tellers....who weave tales which seduce listeners. That's why so many of my texts lie around in an unfinished state - it's not that I lack the discipline or patience to complete them....I simply don't have the skill....

But this is a different sort of book - more like a collection of essays you can dip into at any point whenever the mood takes you....not having to bother about the story line or the history of - or connections between - the various characters who figure in the story....

So, take heart, this is not a book to daunt you - but rather....to get you moving...

PART I

Is a cri-de-coeur as I tried to articulate over a decade what seemed nothing short of a collapse of the moral order in which I had been brought up

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 this next section therefore -

- An indictment is read
- 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

Post Title	Tags	Bottom line?
<i>The Indictment</i>	Seeking the common ground	How I saw the world in 2014
<i>Stories we tell</i>	Frame analysis, tropes, memes,	Different ways we try to make sense of the world
<i>Why we disagree</i>	Wicked problems	Pity no one has yet applied frame analysis to the global economic crisis
<i>The scale of our moral collapse</i>	Corporations, politicians, greed, lying, growth, spying, inequality	Has human nature changed?
<i>A Staircase Tale about the devil</i>	Corruption, accountability	A famous Bulgarian parable
<i>The new religion</i>	Management, economics, faith	It really helps to consider economic and management authors as high priests of the latest religion
<i>A letter to the younger generation</i>	Hope, mutual support, organisation	Sound dying words
<i>The revenge of history?</i>	Spengler, Toynbee	Explain the significance of the table used as a frontispiece

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](#)

In 2015 I set up a new website - [Mapping the Common Ground](#) - which tried to pull together my feelings about what was going on and came up with a rather pessimistic credo

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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](#)" (as Andrew Shonfield argued) 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

- the media are now part of the entertainment industry; newspaper titles have shrunk in number; and investigative journalism long dead. All this has been best exposed by writers such as John Keane - eg in "[Media Decadence and Democracy](#)" (2010) 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](#)

- conomists 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 - if not downright propogandists

- 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

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](#)

Update on story-telling

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/283024595_Storytelling/download

Christian Salmon

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!

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 one's 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.

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](#). But the discipline as a whole is a let-down and rarely offers good insights - "[Against Management](#)" is a good example.

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, 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 [A Very Short, Fairly Interesting and Reasonably Cheap Book about Studying Organisations](#) is a clear and powerful read.

- *"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 Presbyterian 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 Burraway](#) has been one of the main protagonists. Richard Norgarrd is another - with his [Church of Economism and its Discontents](#)

RH North

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.

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.

dOrganize. 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 drawerfuls 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-

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, recent years 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](#) -

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) 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](#)

Themes of intellectual discussion	
The managerial revolution	f.x.w
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	

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.....

Some time ago, I doodled a table which tried to catch the focus of intellectual discussion, decade by decade, starting with the 1930s - 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 a radical 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](#) 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.....

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	

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.....

PART II

Ruminations

The next 30 pages are what the academics call “a literature review”



These are some of the notes I made as I tried to make sense of what "experts" were saying in the hundreds (indeed thousands) of books which have deluged us about "the crisis". I don't want your eyes to glaze over then you come across some of the lists in this section so let me anticipate some of your questions....

1. If I'm so critical of economists, who do I mention so many Economics books?

The majority of well-written books about the global crisis are actually not written by economists! There's a table in this section (page 42 or thereabouts) which gives examples of the books in 9 other disciplines apart from economics

2. OK but why inflict so many titles on us?

Two reasons. First anyone who wants to be taken seriously in discussions needs to be aware of the key names and titles in "the literature" - even if you only flick a few pages to get a sense of their style

Second, people differ in their tastes - and I've tried to structure the lists by various categories to allow you to find what suits you...

I would agree that academics are too good at throwing bibliographies at us. Indeed they overwhelm us with them - whether in footnotes, brackets or end-pages. It's almost a virility test with them. I get very frustrated with this - since all these lists do is to flaunt their superiority - they don't actually tell us anything interesting about each book. That's why the first thing I do when I pick up a new book on the subject is to flick to the end to see what "further reading" they recommend.

It's remarkable how few I find. I immediately warm to any author who includes such notes.

3. Surely neoliberalism has been discredited?

You would think that as the deregulation which was its hallmark blew up in our faces, this would have led to a rethink but as Colin Crouch first showed in 2011 (and Philip Mirowski in 2013) the doctrine of commercialising anything that moves has actually strengthened.

Most people are still scratching their heads to try to understand how this happened and why it seems so difficult to put an alternative agenda together...

4. Why can't progressives unite around an agreed agenda for change?

There are a lot of egos at stake! But also so many different perspectives. And it is a notorious fact of history that progressive forces tend to fight one another more than "the enemy". Understand that, and we will be half way to achieving consensus

5. Why should I trust anything you say?

If this is the first time you have come across my material, this is precisely the question you need to pose..The only answer I can give is that you will see from the blog I have had for 10 years that I try to keep an open mind on issues - painfully aware of the legitimacy of the different ways of seeing things

Title	What the reader takes away
Round up the Usual Suspects!	The failure to develop a consensus to defeat neoliberalism is a serious issue which few writers are taking seriously
The rare Economic Books which enlighten	Specialists have such a narrow focus - and are so used to talking to students and other academics - that they have lost the art of communication. I recommend a dozen books which actually bring economics to life
The Different approaches to the crisis taken by academic disciplines	A unique table I've developed which plots books and authors according to both their academic discipline (I selected nine) and ideological position
Another Dog that failed to Bark	
Other Ways to make sense of it all	This introduces a good "typology" ie a way of classifying the very different approaches and the reasons for their divergent conclusions
Exemplary critics	Application of the typology - with examples of the books and writers who have made sense to me
A rare example of good writing	When you come across an author who holds your interest, you start to ask why others can't do the same....
PostWar Mood music - how the intellectuals made sense of our economic system	This is my annotated list of important books - from the 1950s to the start of the crash. Be warned - there are about 50 titles

Round up the Usual Suspects!



One of the questions which nags away at me is why "progressives" don't spend more time trying to seek a consensus agenda which can halt the downward spiral into which our societies have plunged since the 1970s.

Since the global crisis of 2008, it has been obvious (to most) that the economy (if not society) was broken - trouble is that people could not agree what the causes

were.

Energies (and time) were wasted in parading "the usual scapegoats". **Bring back "the seventh enemy"!!!**

And there was too ready an assumption that those responsible would be contrite and change their behaviour; and/or that governments would enact strong measures (in the style of the Roosevelt New Deal of the 30s).

Only slowly did it seem to dawn on people that, far from slamming the brakes on, corporate power and the political class were driving relentlessly on - imbued, it appears, with an ideological fervour for what, rightly or wrongly, we call neo-liberalism. Colin Crouch dealt with this question in 2011 in his [The Strange Non-Death of Neo-Liberalism](#) - although the book is a bit theoretical.

Philip Mirowski is a historian of economic thought whose 2013 book [Never Let a Serious Crisis Go to Waste - how neo-liberalism survived the financial meltdown](#) has a 41 page list of books and poses these questions -

- What were the key causes of the crisis?
- Have economists of any stripe managed to produce a coherent and plausible narrative of the crisis, at least so far? And what role have heterodox economists played in the dispute?
- What are the major political weaknesses of the contemporary neoliberal movement?
- What lessons should the left learn from the neoliberals, and which should they abjure?
- What would a counter-narrative to that of the neoliberals look like?

But the book only really touches (and briefly) on the second of these questions - the others he suggests "demand lavishly documented advocacy and lengthy disputations" and maybe an alternative left project. His book, he concludes with surprising modesty for such

a pyrotechnic writer, simply "dispels some commonplace notions that have gotten in the way of such a project".

Neoliberals have triumphed in the global economic crisis, he suggests, because -

- Contrary evidence didn't dent their world view
- They "redoubled their efforts to influence and capture the economics profession"

This conclusion, frankly, left me feeling a bit let down - after I had devoted a couple of days to wading through his verbiage.....surely a guy with his experience and reading can do better??? What we need are comparisons and classifications of this reading.....

The economists have had at least a decade to publish their analyses of the process of collapse; to identify the reasons and to suggest measures - both rectifying and preventive. [The Financial Crisis - who is to blame](#) (2009) by **Howard Davies** the ex-Chair of the British Financial Services Agency [identified 39 different explanations](#) of its possible cause. You can see [some overheads](#) and videos from his various presentations [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#)

Two frequently referenced articles are [Reading about the financial crisis - a 21 book review](#) - a 40 page note produced in 2012 by Andrew Lo which, as he puts it in the introduction,

"underscores the desperate need for the economics profession to establish a single set of facts from which more accurate inferences and narratives can be constructed"

["Getting up to speed on the causes of the financial crisis"](#) looks at only 16 documents between 2007-09

A (very short) [Financial Crisis reading List](#) is offered by a blog but one which serves a very simple E-book - "Too Big Has Failed". The short [annotated list offered by the Pluto Press](#) simply advertises a few books in that particular publisher's stable.

[Misrule of Experts](#) (2011) is one of a large number of papers produced by the Centre for Research on Socio-Cultural Change which offers a useful analysis of the financial crisis - but hardly a bibliography - let alone an annotated one. And the same is true of [the minority report](#) produced by the [Financial Crisis Inquiry Commission](#) in 2011

[Responsibilities, ethics and the Financial Crisis](#) is a useful website.....part of a 3 year Arts and Humanities Research Council-funded project which brings together "philosophers, economists and social policy academics". It too has reading lists - but none of them annotated.

We had to wait until 2015 for Martin Wolff and 2018 to get the definitive from Adam Tooze

But there must be other reasons which discourage the mass of discontented people from uniting under a common banner.

Most people are confused; some are just skeptical if not fatalistic; but a significant number of highly educated people are infected, I suspect, by the social disease of individualism which lies, I feel, at the heart of our malaise.

We simply no longer believe in the possibility of effective collective action. And too many of the big names who write the tracts about the global crisis present their analyses and prescriptions with insufficient reference to the efforts of others. They have to market their books - and themselves - and, by that very act, alienate others who could be their comrades in arms. For example, I'm just beginning to look at David Harvey's latest book - [Seventeen Contradictions and the End of Capitalism](#) - and can see no mention of alternative ways of dealing with the crisis.

That's why I suggested that Henry Mintzberg was one of the few people who seemed able to help create such a consensus - a set of minimum requirements. He is a management guru from whom one does not readily expect to hear the message that the world has gone mad. More usually management theorists celebrate the bosses. But Mintzberg (like the discipline's founder, Peter Drucker) know enough about the real world of business to know when things have got out of hand.

I am not a fan of Malcolm Gladwell but his popularisations have included the important notion of [the Tipping Point](#) - where he suggested (in 2010) that there were three key factors which determine whether an idea or fashion will "tip" into wide-scale popularity - the Law of the Few, the Stickiness Factor, and the Power of Context. The "Law of the Few" proposes that a few key types of people must champion an idea, concept, or product before it can reach the tipping point. Gladwell describes these key types as -

- Connectors,
- Mavens, and
- Salesmen.

(And a maven - in case you didn't know - is a trusted expert in a particular field, who seeks to pass knowledge on to others. The word maven comes from the Hebrew, via Yiddish, and means one who understands, based on an accumulation of knowledge).

If individuals representing all three of these groups endorse and advocate a new idea, it is much more likely that it will tip into exponential success. The other 2 concepts are, frankly, not so well dealt with - and need to go the wider literature of [change management and social marketing](#) to get the whole picture.

My point is simply that most writers on the global crisis seem to focus their thoughts and text on the WHAT rather than on the HOW. - the ideas about the causes of and remedies for the crisis rather than the process by which "change for the better" might be managed. Of course we are still missing the "shared agenda" - the identification of which requires a "maven-like" character. And then the networkers and the organisers.

What to read for Economical Enlightenment?

Despite my 4 years of economic studies (and some years actually teaching it to others!), I make no claim to understand the nature of the global plague that has befallen us in the past few decades. I start to read the books which promise to clear my confusion but find that my eyes soon glaze over....

I toiled during my studies in the early 1960s to make sense of its focus on marginal calculations and "indifference curves" but can remember only the following lessons from my four years engrossed in economics books

- the strictness of the various preconditions which governed the idea of (perfect) competition - making it a highly improbable occurrence;
- the questionable nature of the notion of "profit-maximisation";
- the belief (thanks to the writings of James Burnham and Tony Crosland) that management (not ownership) was the all- important factor
- trust (thanks to Keynes whose work was dinned into me) in the ability of government to deal with such things as "exuberant expectations"
- the realization (through the report of the 1959 [Radcliffe Commission](#)) that cash was but a small part of money supply. Financial economics was in its infancy then.

For someone with my education and political motivation and experience, however, my continued financial illiteracy is almost criminal but not, I feel, in any way unusual. Most of us seem to lack the patience to buckle down and take the time and discipline it needs to understand the operation of the system of financial capitalism which now has us all in its thrall. Over the years, I've read and collected books and articles to try to help me identify the sort of agenda and actions which might unite a fair-minded majority

We leave it to the "experts" and have thereby surrendered what is left to us of citizenship and political power. Like many people, I've clicked, skimmed and saved - but rarely gone back to read thoroughly. The folders in which they have collected have had various names - such as "urgent reading" or "what is to be done" - but rarely accessed. Occasionally I remember one and blog about it.

As an avid reader for more than half a century, I have become increasingly impatient with the shortcomings of material on "the global crisis". Their bibliographies may look impressive and their chapter headings riveting - but the books increasingly suffer, in my view, from the following sorts of deficiencies -

- They are written by academics - who write for students and other academics
- and lack "hands-on" experience of other worlds

- the author's speciality indeed is a sub-discipline - eg financial economics
- the books make claims to originality
- but fail to honour the google scholar adage of "standing on the shoulders of giants" (despite - perhaps even because of - the extensive bibliographies)
- and are written to meet publisher requirements to fit "market niches"

I recently suggested 4 books which gave what I considered an alternative account of modern economics -. But I realised that I had omitted not only the best written one (Keen) but an old favourite (Douthwaite); one that is causing a quite a stir (Raworth); as well as the one I would probably rate the best for the interested citizen needing an up-to-date and easy to follow explanation of what is wrong with most economics textbooks (Weeks).

So my more considered recommendations are (chronologically) -

[For the Common Good](#); Herman Daly and John Cobb (1989). The book which inspired a different approach to economics - written by a theologian (Cobb) and Herman Daley who for 6 years was the principal economist of the World Bank. But, by virtue of being a train blazer, not the easiest of reads

[Short Circuit - strengthening local economies in an unstable world](#) - Ronald Douthwaite (1996). Very practical - but also inspirational....two decades on, it hasn't really been bettered. Full text available at the link

[Debunking Economics - the naked emperor dethroned](#); Steve Keen (2001 and 2011) Written before the crash, it might be called the first alternative textbook (except it's much greater fun to read!). Can be read in full.

[Economics for Everyone - a short guide to the economics of capitalism](#); Jim Stanford (2006) is a very user-friendly book and has an excellent "[further reading](#)" list which was probably the best there was at that time....Once upon a time it was freely available on the internet but now I can find only excerpts.....

[23 Things they didn't tell you about capitalism](#); Ha Joon-Chang (2010)

[Zombie Economics - how dead ideas still walk among us](#); by John Quiggin (2010) is a great read - with a self-explanatory title. He is an Australian author currently completing a book called [Economics in Two Lessons](#)...

[Austerity - the history of a dangerous idea](#); Mark Blyth (2013) written by a political scientist/political economist, it shows how old theories still affect the contemporary world profoundly

[Economics of the 1% - how mainstream economics serves the rich, obscures reality and distorts policy](#); John F Weeks (2014) One of the best introductions to the subject - which can't be faulted for being over-diplomatic!

[Credo - economic beliefs in a world of crisis](#); Brian Davey (2015) An alternative approach to economics which puts it in its cultural and historical context. May be long (at 500 pages) but definitely worth the study...

[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...

[Doughnut economics - 7 ways to think like a 21st century economist](#); Kate Raworth (2017). This Oxford economist has made quite an impact with this book

Shorter Texts worth reading

[Journey to Earthland](#) is a little book I came across recently 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"; and 3 fundamental scenarios presented -

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

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](#).

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

An encouraging American initiative [The Next System](#) had an initial report - [The Next System Report - political possibilities for the 21st Century](#) (2015) which contains extensive references to writing I had not so far encountered and to good community practice in various parts of the world. It has since followed up [with a series of worthwhile papers](#).

At least, people are now prepared to call the system by its name - "capitalism" - before the crisis, this was [a word which rarely passed people's lips](#). Now the talk everywhere is not only of capitalism but "[post-capitalism](#)".....

Why Do Different academic disciplines have a different take on the global crisis?

I've suggested that we're badly served with books about the economic crisis. Authors of such books don't seem to heed Google's injunction to "stand on the shoulders of giants" and

- make little attempt to analyse previous efforts at explanation
- generally spend their time on diagnosis
- leaving prescriptions to the last few pages
- seem to have made up their mind up about the explanation before they started to write and, as a result, fail to share with us (or bother to analyse) the other ways the issue could be seen

Of course, there are exceptions - in particular Howard Davies' [The Financial Crisis](#) (2010) which identified and briefly assessed no fewer than 39 different explanations for the crisis. And I have just been reading [Vampire Capitalism - fractured societies and alternative futures](#) a book by Paul Kennedy which appeared only a few months ago. An academic sociologist, Kennedy earns high points by stating in the very first sentence that he has "stood on the shoulders of so many giants that I am dizzy" and then proves the point by each chapter of his book having extensive notes (often with hyperlinks) and concluding with a bibliography of 25 pages...

More to the point, the book covers pretty extensively a lot of subjects, such as the ecological crisis and the future of work, which are normally ignored in such texts. You really feel that the guy has made a real effort to track down and summarise for us the most important texts in the field - a quite exceptional approach....which so few others attempt. You can check for yourself since the book [can be downloaded in its entirety here](#).

I suspect that one reason for this feature is that the book is based on a much longer textbook he did a few years back called [Global Sociology](#) - which would perhaps explain the lightness of some of the discussion dealing with the feasibility of "green solutions" to the ecological aspects of the crisis. Surprisingly, there is no reference to [Capitalism 3.0](#) (2006) by Peter Barnes - a very fair-minded entrepreneur sensitive to the evils of unregulated capitalism. Nor to people such Paul Hawken....whose [Natural Capitalism - the next industrial revolution](#) made such an impact when it came out as far as back as 1999. Hawken indeed has just released an intensive analysis of 100 "feasible solutions" - assessed by a credible advisory team over the past 3 years..... [Drawdown](#)

Somewhere I have made the comment that the best books on the subject for me are actually not written by economists - so I thought I would test that throwaway remark and came up with the following table which simply identifies (very subjectively) some seminal titles which are placed not quite in a left-right spectrum but more in a "tonal" spectrum.....

Key Texts about the crisis – by academic discipline – and “tone”

Discipline	Critical	Moderate	Apologists
Economics	Globalisation and its Discontents ; Joseph Stiglitz (2002) Debunking Economics – the naked emperor dethroned ; Steve Keen (2011 edition) Debt and Neo-Feudalism ; Michael Hudson (2012)	Shifts and Shocks – what we've learned, and still have to, from the financial crisis ; Martin Wolf (2014) – with accompanying power point presentation	Why Globalisation Works ; Martin Wolf (2004) most of the discipline
Economic history/History/ history of economic thought	Never Let a Good Crisis go to waste ; Philip Mirowski (2013)	Crashed – how a decade of financial crises changed the world Adam Tooze (2018)	
Political economy	Austerity – the history of a dangerous idea ; Mark Blyth (2013) The Global Minotaur ; Yanis Varoufakis Susan George	Susan Strange	The discipline still rediscovering itself
Political Science	Crisis without End – the unravelling of western prosperity ; A Gamble (2014) Mammon's Kingdom – an essay on Britain, Now ; David Marquand (2015) Democracy Incorporated – managed democracy and the spectre of inverted totalitarianism ; Sheldon Wolin (2008)	Paul Hirst (stakeholding)	Few pol scientists trespass into the economic field
Sociology	End of capitalism? Michael Mann (2013) Buying Time – the delayed crisis of democratic capitalism ; Wolfgang Streeck (2013) Vampire Capitalism – fractured societies and alternative futures ; Paul Kennedy (2017)	A lot of sociologists seduced into polling work	The sociological voice is still inspired by C Wright Mills –
Geography	A Brief History of Neo-Liberalism – David Harvey (2005). Injustice ; DI Dorling 2014) A Better Politics – how government can make us happier D Dorling (2016)		The geographers are a bolshie lot!
Environment		Why we can't agree about Climate Change ; Mike Hulme	they pride themselves on

		(2009) Natural Capitalism - the next industrial revolution; Paul Hawken (1999)	their technocracy
Journalism	The Capitalism Papers - Fatal Flaws of an Obsolete System; Jerry Mander (2012). Post Capitalism - a guide to our Future; Paul Mason (2015)	How Good Can we be - ending the mercenary society Will Hutton (2015)	They don't enjoy the tenure of the academics
Management and management studies	Rebalancing Society; Henry Mintzberg (2014) Chris Grey	Peter Senge Charles Handy Capitalism 3.0 Peter Barnes (2006)	Most management writers are apologists - apart from the critical management theorists
Religious studies	Laudato-Si - Pope Francis' Encyclical (2015). Accessible in its entirety here	Questions of Business Life; Higginson (2002)	A more ecumenical bunch!

It's significant that the best expositions of the global economic crisis and its causes rarely come from economists.....somehow the framework within which the modern economist operates precludes him/her from even the vaguest of glimmerings of understanding of the complexity of socio-economic events. Their tools are no better than adequate for short-term work.....

For real insights into the puzzles of the modern world, think rather David Harvey (a geographer) and his [A Brief History of Neoliberalism](#) (2005); John Lanchester and James Meek (novellists and writers); [Susan Strange](#), [Susan George](#) or [Colin Crouch](#) (political science); or Wolfgang Streeck - a Koeln Professor of Sociology. All have extensive and eclectic reading; a focus on the long-term; and the ability to provoke and write clearly. "Eclectic" is the key word; few economists are trained these days in political economy - which roots the study of economics in the wider context of history and political analysis.....

Another Dog that failed to bark

My father's generation shunned debt - and knew that the products of manufacturing industry were the real thing. [My generation thought that it knew better](#). At any rate it wanted better and made a Faustian deal. It's payback time now - and few writers are able to explain what has happened, let alone how we cope with the new world.

[Howard Davies and Robert Skidelsky](#) have written about the financial crisis - the first of whom looked briefly at 39 possible explanations (!!). I've also given space to the more radical accounts of [Paul Mason](#) and [Yanis Varoufakis](#) who put the events in a deeper

context; and to the more apocalyptic writers such as [William Greer](#) and [Dmitry Orlov](#) who not only give their own explanations but also spell out the scale and details of the changes we need to make in our own personal lives if we are to survive. Only 2 of these writers could be designated as academic (Skidelsky and Varoufakis).

In this first section I want to introduce some of what I regard as the key writing of the past 25 years about what was clearly a "global crisis" before the financial collapse of 2007/08 - and in that to prove the point about the irrelevance of academic specialists

Henry Mintzberg is a (Canadian) management guru whose [Rebalancing Society - radical renewal beyond left, right and centre](#) (2014) mounts a strong critique of the direction the Western world has taken in the last 25 years and suggests (but all too briefly) an agenda for change. It is the key part of what is to be a series of pamphlets which he has been encouraged to embark by people like me talking to him as one of the knowledgeable and sane voices in a mad world.

I remember his 2000 "Management in Government" paper which started with the assertion that it was not capitalism which won in 1989 but "the balanced model" ie a system in which there was some sort of balance between the power of commerce, the state and the citizen. Patently things have got badly out of balance in the intervening 15 years! The push to privatise everything will, he warned then, lead to the same disease of communist societies.

He has [an interview about the pamphlet here](#). His original piece is in this useful collection of thoughts about [The Corporation of the Future](#).

David Harvey - whose [A Brief History of NeoLiberalism](#) (2005) and "[The Enigma of Capital](#)"; and the crisis of capitalism" (2010) have long been "must-reads" in this field - is actually a geographer!

And the best stuff on the role of pension funds (and how they might be changed) is by a Marxist intellectual not associated with academia - [Robin Blackburn](#).

Peter Barnes published in 2006 a thoughtful critique and alternative vision - [Capitalism 3.0](#) - based on his experience as an entrepreneur. All 200 pages can be downloaded from this internet link.

Paul Kingsnorth, Bill McKibben, George Monbiot, Paul Mason and Naomi Klein are just a few of the many campaigning journalists - Bill McKibben's writings are inspirational- eg [Deep Economy: Economics as if the World Mattered](#)

Paul Kingsnorth's [One No - many Yeses; a journey to the heart of the global resistance movement](#) gives a marvellous sense of the energy a lot of people are spending fighting global capitalism in a variety of very different ways.

Will Hutton is also a British journalist - who cares about ideas and shares his wide and deep reading in his books; someone who can and does try to build bridges between the worlds of academia and action. His [How Good We Can Be](#) (not to be confused with [As Good as it Gets!](#)) is the latest of the series of books which Hutton has been writing on the DNA of Anglo-American capitalism since "The State We're In" (1995) and [Them and Us](#) (2010)

William Davies published a useful booklet [Reinventing the Firm](#) (Demos 2009) which suggests some adjustments to corporate legislation on similar lines to Hutton. He then went on to write neoliberalism

Paul Hawken published in 2000 an important book [Natural Capitalism](#) which showed the economic benefits which could flow from a variety of ecological products. Ernst von Weizsaecker has long been an eloquent spokesman for this approach see the 2009 [Factor Five report](#) for the Club of Rome.

The only UK academic I know who has written blunt analyses about the nature of our political system is the political development scientist - [Colin Leys](#) - whose time in Africa has clearly given him an important perspective his British academic colleagues lack (with the possible exception of Peter Mair).

Sheldon Wolin is another rare political scientist who, after his retirement in his 80s, stunned us with a powerful blast at the American system - [Democracy Incorporated - managed democracy and the specter of inverted totalitarianism](#) (2008)

Sociologists are the masturbators par excellence - although Olin Wright is an honourable exception with his recent ["Envisioning Realistic Utopias"](#) (2009) from the USA.

Other challenging stuff comes in America from speculators like Nassim Taleb and George Soros - although Nobel-winning Joseph Stiglitz is an enfant terrible of the Economics profession and of World Bank and IMF policies there.

Of course all this reflects the economic structure of the knowledge industry - with rewards going to ever-increasing specialisation (and mystification) - and, more recently, the binding of university funding to industrial needs.

When I was in academia in the 1970s, I was shocked at how actively hostile academics were to inter-disciplinary activity. (ref Russell Jacoby....)

And the only Marxists who have managed to make a career in academia have generally been historians - who posed no threat since they offered only analysis or, like Edward Thompson, action against nuclear weapons.

I have therefore a feeling that the first step in bringing any sense to our political systems is a powerful attack on how social sciences are structured in the modern university - using Stanislaw's "Social Sciences as Sorcery" (very sadly long out of print) as the starting point. Instead of ridiculing Macburger Degrees, we should be honouring them as the logical extension of the contemporary university system.

I wonder if French and German social scientists are any different. Jacques Attali (ex-Head of the EBRD) is a prolific writer - although his little book "Sept leçons de Vie - survivre aux crises" has absolutely no bibliographical references so it is difficult to know his reading.

What I suppose I am trying to say is that **change requires**

- (a) description of what's wrong (making the case for change);
- (b) explaining how we got to this point (an analytical model);
- (c) a programme which offers a relevant and acceptable way of dealing with the problems; and
- (d) mechanisms for implementing these programmes in a coherent way.

We have a lot of writing in the first three categories - but I find that most authors think the task is finished when they produce at page 300 the outline of their programme.

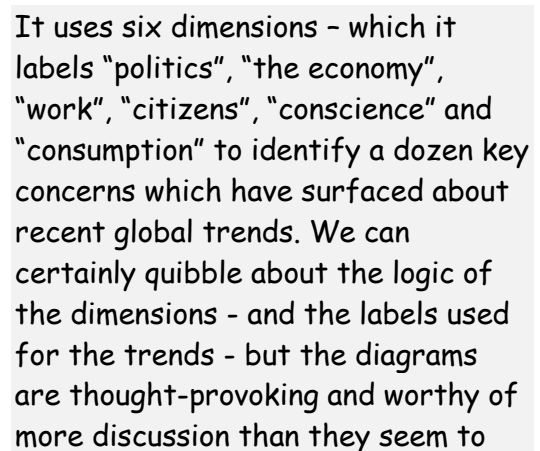
Most books about the "global crisis" focus on the easy part of the story - "diagnosis" and "blame" - and skate over the really challenging (later) stages of the process of social change - such as prescription ("what is to be done?"); and, most of all, "coalition-building" (with what sources of power?).

This indeed gives another couple of tests for any book about the global crisis -

- What proportion of space they devote to the later, prescriptive, stage
- What awareness they show of the "problems of agency" ie of the fragile nature of the "toolkit of change" which the change management literature introduced us to in the 1980s

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).

I recently 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....



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 my suggestions are shown in the diagram which starts section IV. 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.....

It's not difficult to itemise what's wrong - it's so much more difficult to identify the path we should be taking to get what [Henry Mintzberg](#) calls a "Rebalanced Society".

David Korten has been critiquing the operation of American companies and setting out alternatives - using both books and [a website](#) - since [When Corporations Rule the World](#) (1995). One of his latest books is [Agenda for a new economy](#) - much of which can be accessed here - [Agenda for a new Economy - from Phantom Wealth to Real Wealth](#) and which continues his sterling effort in the last 2 decades to sketch out a better way. He is someone who practiced mainstream economic consultancy - and then saw the error of his ways (see Prologue from page 11 of [one of his first books](#)). Such reformed gangsters make better analysts of [the "mafia" system which is modern professionalism](#).

If you're looking for one single book to help you make sense of the mad system of globalisation and also to show how, at the most practical level, it can be changed then it must be the Irish economist **Richard Douthwaite's** [Short Circuit - strengthening local economies for security in an unstable world](#) - published in 1996 but as relevant now as it was then.

[Questions of Business Life](#) (2002) by Richard Higginson's short book is a useful summary of the various critiques of capitalism in the last few decades of the 20th century. Very accessible and all the more thoughtful for its occasional references to the Bible and the deity!

[Capitalism 3.0 - reclaiming the commons](#) is a book to which I did not pay enough attention when it first came out in 2006 - it is one of these stimulating books produced by a practical person impatient with the conventional wisdom. **Peter Barnes** has been active in social enterprise and believes that society should reward successful initiative with profit. At the same time, he knows that profit-seeking activities have unhealthy side effects - "They cause pollution, waste, inequality, anxiety, and no small amount of confusion about the purpose of life". He would like to believe in the role of government in society - but

I'm a businessman. I believe society should reward successful initiative with profit. At the same time, I know that profit-seeking activities have unhealthy side effects. They cause pollution, waste, inequality, anxiety, and no small amount of confusion about the purpose of life.

I'm also a liberal, in the sense that I'm not averse to a role for government in society. Yet history has convinced me that representative government can't adequately protect the interests of ordinary citizens. Even less can it protect the interests of future generations, ecosystems, and nonhuman species. The reason is that most—though not all—of the time, government puts the interests of private corporations first. This is a systemic problem of a capitalist democracy, not just a matter of electing new leaders.

If you identify with the preceding sentiments, then you might be confused and demoralized, as I have been lately. If capitalism as we know it is deeply flawed, and government is no savior, where lies hope? This strikes me as one of the great dilemmas of our time.

For years the Right has been saying—nay, shouting—that government is flawed and that only privatization, deregulation, and tax cuts can save us.

For just as long, the Left has been insisting that markets are flawed and that only government can save us.

The trouble is that both sides are half-right and half-wrong. They're both right that markets and state are flawed, and both wrong that salvation lies in either sphere.

But if that's the case, what are we to do? Is there, perhaps, a missing set of institutions that can help us? I began pondering this dilemma about ten years ago after retiring from Working Assets, a business I cofounded in 1982. (Working Assets offers telephone and credit card services which automatically donate to nonprofit groups working for a better world.)

My initial ruminations focused on climate change caused by human emissions of heat-trapping gases. Some analysts saw this as a "tragedy of the commons," a concept popularized forty years ago by biologist Garrett Hardin. According to Hardin, people will always overuse a commons because it's in their self-interest to do so.

I saw the problem instead as a pair of tragedies: first a tragedy of the market, which has no way of curbing its own excesses, and second a tragedy of government, which fails to protect the atmosphere because polluting corporations are powerful and future generations don't vote.

"history has convinced me that representative government can't adequately protect the interests of ordinary citizens. Even less can it protect the interests of future generations, ecosystems, and nonhuman species. The reason is that most—though not all—of the time, government puts the interests of private corporations first. This is a systemic problem of a capitalist democracy, not just a matter of electing new leaders.

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[Enough is enough](#) (CASSE 2010) is the report of the first [Steady State Economy](#) Conference, held in the UK in 2010. The conference had two main aims. The first was to raise awareness about the substantial volume of scientific evidence that shows that economic growth (i.e. continuously increasing production and consumption of goods and services) is (a) not environmentally sustainable, and (b) not improving people's lives in wealthy countries like the UK. The second aim was to identify specific,

David Harvey, although a geographer, is the world's best-known exponent of Marx. His latest book is a small one which tries to compress his extensive work into [17 Contradictions and the end of capitalism](#) (2014)

Many people recently were inspired by the work and writings of **Stephane Hessel** who died in his late 90s still campaigning for justice. Not so many have heard of [Joost van Steenis](#) who is one of only a few activists to have taken and time and trouble to write (a couple of) detailed manifestos - [From Chaos to Change - entering a new era and Revolution](#)

[Social Injustice](#) (2011) by **David Dorling** is, for me, a modern RH Tawney. His book starts by reminding us of the [Five Giant Evils](#) of Beveridge's famous 1940s Report which led to the laying of the British Welfare State and goes on to argue -

"It's not just that greed and individualism have risen: the nature of injustice appears to have evolved from the former five giant evils to five quite different looking modern evils. I would suggest we call these: elitism, exclusion, prejudice, greed and despair..... My contention is that, in their modern form, social evils suggest that

- elitism is efficient,*
- exclusion is necessary,*
- prejudice is natural,*
- greed is good*
- despair is inevitable.*

These tenets are most strongly adhered to by those on the right, but many weaker forms underlie much thinking in the centre and left, among parts of the green movement and are found within other otherwise progressive forces. It is belief in these new tenets that leads those in power to talk of people only being able to achieve up to their 'potential' (resulting in elitism)".

[Change the World](#) (1999) is, for me, a strangely neglected book - perhaps because its brash American sub-title "how ordinary people can accomplish extraordinary results" gives the impression of being an airport takeaway.

Like Henry Mintzberg, **Robert Quinn** is actually a management theorist but looks in this book at how leaders such as Christ, Gandhi and Luther King have mobilised people for major change. As the blurb says - "the idea that inner change makes outer change possible has always been part of spiritual and psychological teachings. But not an idea that's generally addressed in leadership and management training".

The book is an excellent antidote for those who are still fixated on the expert model of change - those who imagine it can be achieved by "telling", "forcing" or by participation. Quinn exposes the last for what it normally is (despite the best intentions of those in power) - a form of manipulation - and effectively encourages us, through examples, to have more faith in people.

Most writing demonstrates a naïve belief in the power of persuasion - the belief that argument can mobilise change. Many people can indeed be persuaded of the "need" for change - but fewer about its precise "direction" and shape..... Robert Quinn is one of the few people who has powerfully pointed out how mechanistic is the discourse of reformist "persuasion" - with its assumption that an intellectual elite has the capacity to "mobilise" people to its way of thinking.....

His books talk rather of the power of example.....and the growing literature on systems theory of the "emergence" of new methods and models...

There is a recent fascinating American project - [The Next System](#) whose short, initial publication promised to -

launch a national debate on the nature of "the next system" using the best research, understanding, and strategic thinking, on the one hand, and on-the-ground organizing and development experience, on the other, to refine and publicize comprehensive alternative political-economic system models that are

different in fundamental ways from the failed systems of the past and capable of delivering superior social, economic, and ecological outcomes.

By defining issues systemically, we believe we can begin to move the political conversation beyond current limits with the aim of catalyzing a substantive debate about the need for a radically different system and how we might go about its construction. Despite the scale of the difficulties, a cautious and paradoxical optimism is warranted. There are real alternatives. Arising from the unforgiving logic of dead ends, the steadily building array of promising new proposals and alternative institutions and experiments, together with an explosion of ideas and new activism, offer a powerful basis for hope.

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 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 - starting 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) is her take on the ecological crisis

[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 was holed up in London's Ecuador Embassy for 7 years 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

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 these 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 its 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](#)

Update; *it's so unusual to find economists writing good prose that I did another post when I [discovered a lively textbook by Varoufakis](#)*

Po

stWar Mood Music – How the intellectuals 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

[Stakeholder Capitalism](#); ed Kelly and A Gamble (1997). For a brief moment in the mid 9-s, the concept of "stakeholding" caught the imagination of UK leftists before Tony Blair slammed the door shut on it.

- [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....
- [Debunking Economics](#); Steve Keen (2001) a fantastic and systematic taking apart of economists' pretentious waffle
- [Questions of Business Life](#); Higginson (2002) A fascinating summary of various critiques for business, written by the Dean of a seminary....
- [Globalisation and its Discontents](#); Joseph Stiglitz (2002) is one of the best of its time on the subject - exposing the emptiness of economics orthodoxy....
- "[We are Everywhere](#) - a celebration of community enterprise" (2003)
- [Parecon - life after capitalism](#); Michel Albert (2003) - The strange title word refers to "participatory economics". Albert first came to my attention in the 1990s with his writing about the "Rhenish" model of capitalism. I wasn't aware of this book until now - and it looks a very clear exposition of an alternative way of thinking of economic systems
- [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. His 2014 update is a more sober assessment....
- [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...
- [Making Globalisation Work](#); Joseph Stiglitz (2006) One of the best and most knowledgeable writers in the field
- [The Culture of the new capitalism](#); Richard Sennett (2006). Sennett remains one of the few intellectuals capable of matching Daniel Bell in the lucidity of their expositions (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 sociologist's take.....

And then came the Crash

PART III Sketches for a Future World

We are now experienced ten years of the global crisis - although a lot of writers now concede that the rot started a lot earlier...The Marxists may be a bit extreme in suggesting about 150 years earlier.....although there is a christian school of thought that would go back to the Garden of Eden....

Initially the suggested remedies were technical in nature - if massive in their financial implications, with private debt being nationalised and creating traumatic increases in state debt. But as the various austerity programmes bit, social reactions have led to what is called "populistic" politics.....

Title	Takeaway
Sketches of a broken world	The key books since 2010
Fightback	Some inspirations to action
A Neglected Classic	I've never understood why Robert Quinn is so neglected
Thinking beyond Capitalism	A typology
Small is still Beautiful	How a 1970s idea has grown
The Commons	A fresh way of looking at things
There is another Way	A reminder of the importance of workers' cooperatives
Cooperation	And of the importance of this ethic
Beacons of Hope	Some examples
In Praise of Political Economy	The comeback of an old Scottish discipline Blyth, Streeck. Varoufakis, Stiglitz
Populist - and proud of it	A look at some of the growing literature on the subject

Sketches of a broken World

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 issues 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.....

Let's look at some of the key texts which appeared after the crisis and also 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. I also readily confess that many of them have been only skimmed and I really need to go back and do justice to such authors as Davies, Gamble and Harvey....

[How Markets Fail - the logic of economic calamities](#); John Cassidy (2009) Amazing that this journalist could not only give us some first thoughts on the global financial breakdown of 2008 but put this in the context of a critical analysis of mainstream economists over the past 2 centuries

[The Road from Mont Pelerin - the making of the neoliberal thought collective](#); ed P Mirowski and D. Plehwe (2009) One of the first books to explain in detail how the thinkers who found themselves on the margins after 1945 got together and found the money to fund the hundreds of Think Tanks which created the neoliberal doctrine which now rules the world.

[23 Things they didn't tell you about capitalism](#); Ha Joon-Chang (2010) One of the best exposures of the myths economists would have us believe

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

[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 one of 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 became even stronger...Crouch is a political scientist but not the easiest of reads.

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

[Debunking Economics - the naked emperor dethroned](#); Steve Keen (2011) an updated version of his powerful 2001 critique. One of the best there is....

[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

[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 Crisis of global capitalism - Pope Benedict XVI's social encyclical and the future of political economy](#); ed A Pabst (2011) I wasn't even aware of this encyclical until I came across this book recently

[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](#)

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

[Buying Time - the delayed crisis of democratic capitalism](#); Wolfgang Streeck (2013) Highly readable critique from a German sociologist - called, in [this long review, a "reluctant radical"](#)

[Never let a serious crisis go to waste - how neoliberalism survived the financial meltdown](#); Philip Mirowski (2013); too much jargon and verbosity for my taste - although it has received a lot of attention as [you will see from this symposium](#). The author [defines here the 13 commandments of neoliberalism](#). "The Road from Mont Pelerin" which he edited in 2009 tells a better story.

[Disassembly Required - a field guide to actually existing capitalism](#); Geoff Mann (2013) A tantalising little book (written in simple English) which purports to offer an explanation free of the usual

myths; focuses usefully on the rise of "financialisation" after the 1970s; but, ultimately, disappoints with a "cultivate one's garden" conclusion.

[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

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

[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; Andrew Cumbers (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 well-written and thoughtful sociological analysis which can be read in full at the link

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

[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..

[The Second Machine Age](#), Erik Brynjolfsson and Andrew McAfee (2014). Important analysis of the implications and likely impact of information technology

[Laudato-Si](#) - the Papal Encyclical of 2015 which threw down an ecological and moral challenge to the power elite. 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 Hartmut Rosa (2015 - translated from 2009 German original). Too many of the references I give are, of necessity, anglo-saxon so I am delighted to include this book.

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

[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.....

[Credo - economic beliefs in a world of crisis](#); Brian Davey (2015) An original alternative approach to economics

[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-Witheford (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](#)

[How will Capitalism End?](#); Wolfgang Streeck. (2016) a collection of this political economist's key articles, many from New Left Review. Superbly written but weak on future of work and environment

[Globalisation and its Discontent Revisited](#); Joseph Stiglitz (2017). Stiglitz is one of the clearest writers and has long been free to say exactly what he thinks...

[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...It can [be read in full here](#)

[Crashed; how a decade of financial crises changed the world](#); Adam Tooze (2018) The definitive book on the subject, with [another good review here](#)

[Come On! Capitalism, short-termism, population and the destruction of the planet](#); (Club of Rome 2018). The quality and bite you expect of Club of Rome publications

[Fightback](#)

Focusing on the inanities and criminalities of our various elites requires little effort - there is so much of it and copiously (if not lovingly) described. I came across two recent British examples yesterday - a small book about [the neo-liberal crisis](#) produced in 2012 and an update bearing the name [The Kilburn Manifesto](#).

Both promised a lot but quickly, for me, got lost in their own rhetoric. Much more interesting was the renowned Trans National Institute's [State of Power 2014](#)

released, rather courageously, a few weeks back in the stronghold of corporatism - Davos. It does look a worthwhile read - and, generously, contained a reference to the website of another avid student of corporate evil - [Occupy](#) which put me on to yet another - [SourceWatch](#)



But finding a coherent statement about "What is to be done" seems to require a lot of effort - and almost impossible to find one which cross-references other work. Too many

prophets going their own way - and jealous of others. The [World Social Forum](#) (still attracting thousands of visitors to its annual get together) and [OccupyWall St](#) are both very broad-based; whereas the [Zeitgeist movement](#) seems to be a quasi-religious movement.

I was encouraged by the [summary of](#) and [papers from this recent Conference](#) on the "Restructuring of the Corporation". The papers are certainly fascinating - but suggest (with the exception of Henry Mintzberg) that change will come from within the system. Most people involved in these arguments about social and economic change focus on one or other of the three parts - political, legal or commercial ie stronger, more focused protest or different voting systems; stronger legislation against lobbying for example; or more social enterprise.

Few so far seem to see Mintzberg's point that we need a mixed cocktail!

But where are the handbooks - let alone the annotated bibliographies - to give us a real sense of what can be done? The only one I can think of is Paul Hawken's 2007 [Blessed Unrest](#) which someone has very helpfully [summarised here](#) and [reviewed here](#).

A website simply called [Corporations](#) did give a useful post on [How to Overthrow Corporate Rule - in 5 Steps](#) which reminded me of a very useful four pages of tactical advice given in a 1990s book on the [New Zealand experience with neo-liberal programmes](#)

For more individual efforts we have the inspiring example of 93 year-old [Stephane Hessel](#) who died (in 2013) still articulating his vision of a better world. Or the Dutch activist [Joost van Steenis](#). Both give clear analysis and clarion calls (I particularly liked van Steenis' 21 statements) - but are light on bookish references or recognition of other relevant movements.

But I hadn't heard of [Grace Lee Boggs](#) who is apparently still campaigning in America at the age of 99. A journal devoted to art and politics called Guernica has a [fascinating interview](#) with this Chinese-American philosopher who has been refusing to stand still for nearly a century, mobilizing alongside various freedom struggles from civil rights to climate change campaigns. The opening chapter of her book - [The next American Revolution; sustainable activism for the 21st Century](#) - has echoes, for me, of Robert Quinn's hugely underrated [Change the World](#)

Most of us operate with an "instrumental" or "agency" view of social change. We assume that "a" causes "z" and that socio-economic ills can therefore be dealt with by specific measures. But a couple of decades ago, an approach - variously called "chaos" or "complexity" theory - started to undermine such assumptions. Writers such as Margaret Wheatley and Quinn have shown the implications for management practice - but few activists seem to have understood the implications.

Lee Boggs puts it as follows

I think it's really important that we get rid of the idea that protest will create change. The idea of protest organizing, as summarized by [community organizer] Saul Alinsky, is that if we put enough pressure on the government, it will do things to help people. We don't realize that that kind of organizing worked only when the government was very strong, when the West ruled the world, relatively speaking.

But with globalization and the weakening of the nation-state, that kind of organizing doesn't work. We need to do what I call visionary organizing. Recognize that in every crisis, people do not respond like a school of fish. Some people become immobilized. Some people become very angry, some commit suicide, and other people begin to find solutions. And visionary organizers look at those people, recognize them and encourage them, and they become leaders of the future.

[Quinn's book](#) was produced in 1996 and is an excellent antidote for those who are still fixated on the expert model of change - those who imagine it can be achieved by "telling", "forcing" or by participation. Quinn exposes the last for what it normally is (despite the best intentions of those in power) - a form of manipulation - and effectively encourages us, through examples, to have more faith in people. As the blurb says - "the idea that inner change makes outer change possible has always been part of spiritual and psychological teachings. But not an idea that's generally addressed in leadership and management training".

Quinn looks at how leaders such as Gandhi and Luther King mobilised people for major change and derives certain principles for "change agents" to enable them to help ordinary people achieve transformative change. These principles include recognizing our own hypocrisy and fears; "going with the flow" and "enticing through moral power"

A Neglected Classic

I once wrote an [important post distinguishing 5 very different "theories of change"](#)...wondering why so few mutual links had been made by the practitioners of the 5 "schools". I now realise I may have missed the most important school of all - that of "managing change"

Whenever the issue of change comes up, I rarely miss the chance to plug a book which was published in 2000 - [Change the World](#) by a management theorist Robert Quinn.

It stood out from the huge mass of books about managing change I had been reading in the late 1990s for **its explanation of why so many change efforts fail** - offering a typology (and critique) of four different strategies - "telling", "selling", "participating" and "transforming" - and daring to pose the challenging question of how individuals such as Gandhi, Luther King, Jesus Christ came to inspire millions.....

Virtually all books on managing change until then were (and most remain) what I would call "mechanistic" - offering apparently neutral tools of the sort consultants claiming objectivity can use. Quinn dares to introduce a moral tone - which both management writers and practitioners find a bit embarrassing. Their very legitimacy, after all, rests on the claims they make to scientific authority.....

This is perhaps why most of his writing passes under our radar. The same fate overtook [Robert Greenleaf](#) whose books on "stewardship" are so valuable.....

A European audience does recoil a bit when they see the sub-title of Quinn's *Change the World*, "*how ordinary people can accomplish extraordinary results*" - even if such hyping is a well-known US habit....His book then proceeds to offer 8 injunctions for those who aspire to be change-agents, some of which may offer challenges to the translator - the summary I offer in the middle column is from my memory of a book which is almost 20 years old.

Since then, our view of the world has been hugely upset - not least by the social movements since then; by the 2008 global financial crisis; and by more recent books such as [Reinventing Organisations](#) by Frederic Laloux - my final column offers some preliminary and terse comments on how the injunctions have withstood the test of time

Quinn's 8 Injunctions for changing the world (2000)

Quinn Injunction	What one reader thinks he means	Fit with mainstream and newer literature
"Envisage the Productive Community"	Imagine how the system would work if we treated one another generously - Don't be satisfied with second-best	Laloux has a lot to say about this
"First Look Within"	Set your own standards of excellence - don't go with the mob	The self is very much back in fashion
"Embrace the Hypocritical Self"	Be aware of your own double standards	Still worthwhile
"Transcend Fear"	We always feel a pressure to conform and fear the consequences of appearing different	Ditto
"embody a Vision of the Common Good"	Don't be afraid to demonstrate behavior consistent with what your ethical sense tells you	Laloux and the whole solidarity ethic much stronger these days
Disturb the system		20 years on, we probably have too much of this now!
"Surrender to the Emergent Process"	Events can never be controlled - so let go	Chaos theory also back in fashion
"Entice Through Moral Power"	As above	See Laloux

"Change the World" is actually one of a trilogy Quinn has written - the first being "Deep change" - and the final one "[Building the Bridge as you Walk on it - a guide for leading change](#)" (2004) an outline of whose [basic argument can be found here](#).

Although I often reference Quinn, this is the first time I have written at length about him and notice a tinge of defensiveness as I reflect on his message.....which perhaps sometimes smacks of "motherhood and apple pie". He writes here about how the responses he received from his first book were the inspiration for the third -

They defied what is written in almost all textbooks on management and leadership... common understanding and practice..... suggesting that every one of us has the capacity to transform our organizations into more positive, productive communities. Yet it is a painful answer that almost no one wants to hear. That is why it is not in the books on management and leadership. Painful answers have no market. The man states: "I know it all happened because I confronted my own insecurity, selfishness, and lack of courage."

In the early 1990s I would look for copies of Stephen [Covey's The Seven Habits of really effective People](#) which had been translated into the language of the country I was working in - partly to ensure that we had a common frame of reference but mainly because of its encouragement of what I considered to be useful ethical practices.....

Robert Quinn is still writing - not least on a blog [the positive organization](#) - although I suspect he has fallen prey to what happens to most gurus.....they end up as egocentrics on egotrips.....

More reading on social and organisational change

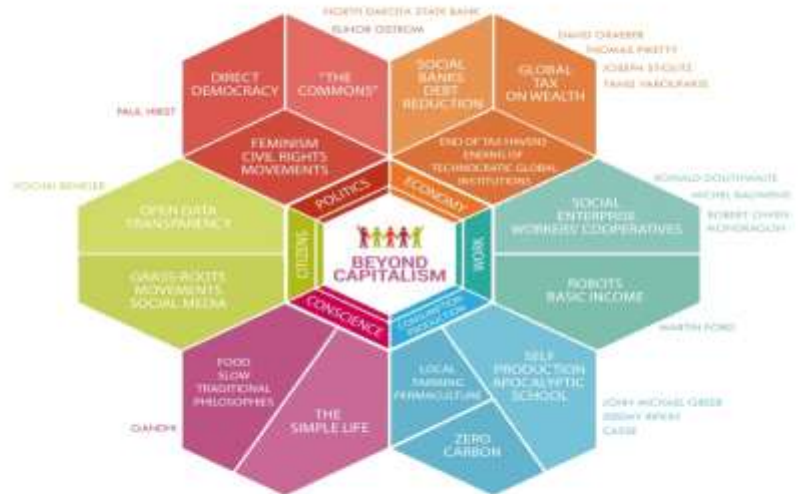
[Supporting small steps - a rough guide for developmental professionals](#) (Manning; OECD 2015)
[A Governance Practitioner's Notebook - alternative ideas and approaches](#) (Whaites et al OECD 2015)
[People, Politics and Change - building communications strategy for governance reform](#) (World Bank 2011)
[Governance Reform under Real-World Conditions - citizens, stakeholders and Voice](#) (World Bank 2008)
[Change Here! Managing change to improve local services](#) (Audit Commission 2001)
chapter 6 of [In Transit - notes on good governance](#) (1999)
https://nomadron.blogspot.com/2018/07/i-have-little-list_10.html

a Robert Quinn resource

<http://business.unr.edu/faculty/simmons/badm720/actchange.pdf>
<https://keithdwalker.ca/wp-content/summaries/1-c/ChangeTheWorld.Quinn.EBS.pdf>
<https://learningforward.org/docs/jsd-fall-2001/quinn224.pdf?sfvrsn=2>
[Building the Bridge as you walk on it - a guide for leading change](#); Robert Quinn (2004) With "[Change the World](#)", one of my all-time favourites. Before attempting the entire book, you might find [this summary useful](#): as well as [this excerpt from the first chapter](#)

Thinking Beyond Capitalism

I owe the basic structure of 6 dimensions and 15 boxes to [the Commons in Transition](#) people; but the simplified text and indicative names are my personal responsibility; 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 -

[click here for an interactive version of my amended version of Beyond Capitalism](#)

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 Bauwen](#) 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....

Small is still Beautiful!

Since the mid 20th century, various maverick voices such as; JK Galbraith ("The Affluent Society" 1958); EJ Mishan ("The Costs of Economic growth" 1967); Ernst Schumacher ("Small is Beautiful" 1973); Leopold Kohr ("The Breakup of nations") and Marlyn Fergusson ("The Aquarian Conspiracy" 1980) have warned us against the blandishments of consumerism.

In the 1980s some of us got hooked on community enterprise and business (as we called it then); the "social economy: (as we discovered the French called it); or social enterprise (New Labour's phrase) - which got some support from the EU and other governments. Somehow, however, the political point got lost. The ventures were seen mainly as a way of helping marginalised people back into the economy. Only the Greens (and writers such as [Richard Douthwaite](#)) kept the more fundamental critique alive - but the energy the Greens have had to devote to the Energy and ecological questions has also diverted them from the larger issues of our economic system.

The literature became more personalised - how to reduce one's ecological footprint and live simply. Very commendable - but basically being a modern version of Voltaire's retreat to cultivation of one's garden (Candide).

In the last few years, the critique has come back - with books such as Oliver James' "Affluenza" (2007) - arriving just in time for the latest global crisis. The publication in July 2009 of [The Spirit Level - why equality is better for everyone](#) seems to have crystallised the contemporary discussion in Britain - and Daniel Dorling's [Injustice - why social inequality persists](#) is a rather tougher ride which gives historical perspective whereas "The Spirit Level" gives the comparative view.

Dorling's book has the same caustic humour and philosophy as JK Galbraith's "The Affluent Society" which introduced to the phrase about private wealth and public squalour. Tragic that - after such warnings - we have reached this same point of having to persuade so many people of the declining returns from private consumption and the benefits of collective consumption ie state spending on public goods such as railways!

Richard Douthwaite's [Short Circuit](#) as one of the most definitive sourcebooks on the practicalities of change at a grassroots level - or, as Ed Mayo puts it "Douthwaite has undertaken the most extensive survey yet of community economics in the industrialized world". You can actually download the entire book (section by section) from the website! To encourage you to do that, let Ed Mayo complete his introduction -

To fully appreciate the significance of this book, we need to ask ourselves why everything we hold dear seems to be threatened. As individuals, we face increasing insecurity in our working lives, on our streets and even within our homes. As societies, we face a ruthlessly competitive global economy, the threat of armed conflict, and a biosphere stressed to the point of collapse. In the face of all this, governments and businesses offer us, at best, a tattered, decaying safety net.

Short Circuit's encouraging message is that the security we need can be found in our own communities by developing our local economies.

But why are communities and families fragmenting?

Why are thousands of species disappearing and the world's climate becoming ever more unstable?

Why is democracy slipping away, and ethnic conflict, poverty, crime and unemployment growing day by day?

The root cause of all these problems often evades even the most intelligent and well-intentioned examination. The world economic system has become so complex, and the attitudes that it has given rise to so all-pervasive, that we now find it is extremely difficult to gain a clear perspective.

However, there is a common thread running through these seemingly disparate crises: namely, a system of production and distribution that depends for its survival on endless expansion.

This continuous growth has led to economic globalization, which essentially means the amalgamation of every local, regional and national economy into a single world system.

Economic globalization is not the result of superior economic efficiency. It is coming about because governments have been subsidizing international and long-distance trade for nearly two hundred years without stopping to assess the impact on society and nature. It is only through tax breaks, cheap fuel, and massive investments in the underlying transport and information infrastructure that apples from New Zealand displace French apples in the markets of Paris, European dairy products destroy local production in milk-rich Mongolia, and Dutch butter costs less than Kenyan butter in the shops of Nairobi. Even a child might ask, 'Why must food be transported thousands of miles, when it can be produced right here?' This is not efficiency but economics gone mad.

Globalization has also led to the growth of huge multinational corporations that have replaced the hundreds of thousands of small businesses, shopkeepers and farmers that traditionally generated most economic activity and employment. And since big firms, unlike small ones, can threaten to move their operations to countries where the fiscal environment is easier, almost every government's ability to raise an adequate amount in tax has been reduced. Consequently, by blindly subsidizing the process of globalization, the nation-state has promoted its own demise.

Moreover, by inducing people everywhere to rely on the same narrow range of industrial resources, the global economic system has greatly increased competition at every level. As a result, unemployment in the industrialized world has soared while, in the cities of the South, populations are exploding because millions of rural families are being drawn away from local self-reliance by the promises of the consumer society - only to be plunged into urban squalor and

hunger. Meanwhile, wilderness areas and biodiversity are under increasing pressure as the demand for industrial resources grows.

The system that has emerged suits nobody: in the long run, there are no winners. Even at the highest levels of society, the quality of life is declining. The threat of mergers leaves even senior managers in permanent fear of losing their jobs. As for the burgeoning list of billionaires, try though they might to fence themselves off from the collapsing social order, they cannot hide from the collapsing biosphere.

It is therefore in everyone's interest that the process of globalization be reversed. The most effective way of doing this would be for governments to get together to curb the powers of the multinationals by negotiating new trade and investment treaties that would remove the subsidies powering globalization and give local production a chance. For example, if the hidden subsidies for fossil fuel use were removed, local and national economies would become much stronger. But such international measures would not in themselves restore health to economics and communities: long-term solutions require a range of small local initiatives that are as diverse as the cultures and the environments in which they take place.

Unfortunately, many people are opposed to the creation of stronger local economics for all manner of reasons. Some, for example, imagine that the aim of economic localization is complete self-sufficiency at the village level. In fact, localization does not mean everything being produced locally, nor does it mean an end to trade. It simply means creating a better balance between local, regional, national and international markets. It also means that large corporations should have less control, and communities more, over what is produced, where, when and how, and that trading should be fair and to the benefit of both parties.

It is also sometimes feared that localization will lead to repression and intolerance. On closer examination, however, it is clear that the opposite is true: the global economy is itself nothing less than a system of structural exploitation that creates hidden slaves on the other side of the world and forces people to give up their rights to their own resources. Localization is not about isolating communities from other cultures, but about creating a new, sustainable and equitable basis on which they can interact. In the North, being responsible for our own needs means allowing the South to produce for itself, rather than for us.

All over the world, campaigns against globalization are growing in strength as people see how it affects their lives, their high streets, and their neighbourhoods - and as they become more aware that there are alternatives. The significance of Richard Douthwaite's book is that he shows that globalization can be contained by using these alternatives in a coherent way. He also shows we can start to build alternative systems today without waiting for politicians to give us their blessing or for the world to burn.

When community initiatives work (and *Short Circuit* describes both successes and failures) they release the imagination of those involved and enable them to take further steps towards economic revitalization, stronger communities, and a healthier environment. But so far, as Richard Douthwaite points out, no community anywhere has implemented more than a few of the many techniques described in this book, so the potential for revitalization is dramatic.

The Commons

[The P2P Foundation](#) sends me at least a couple of interesting posts daily eg [here](#) and [here](#). Their posts have 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>

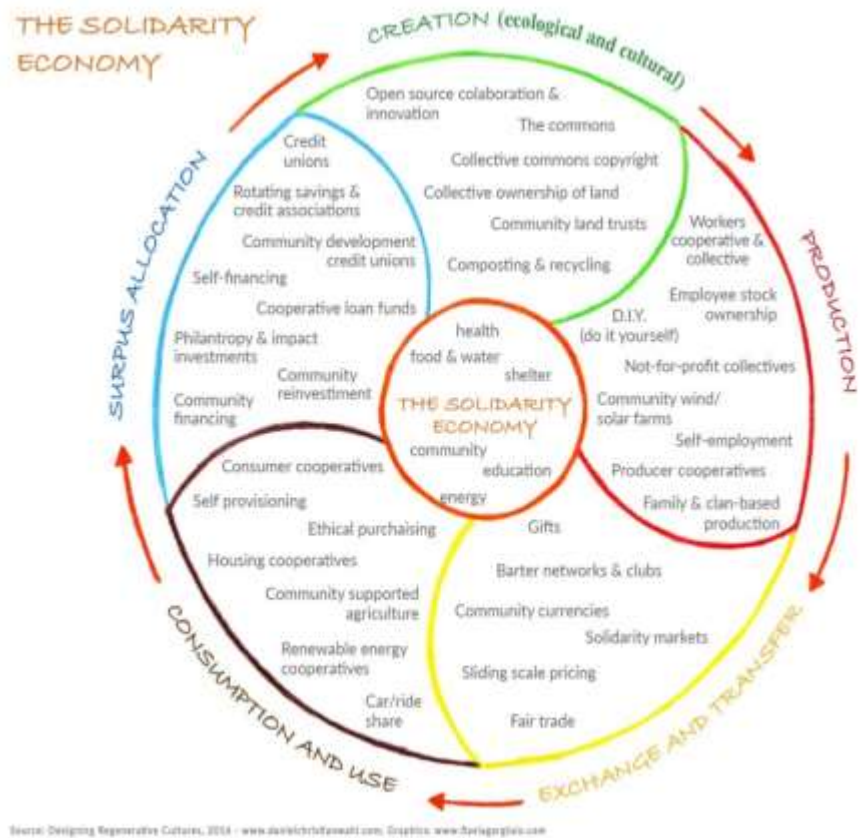
A lot of material relating to "the commons", however, delicately tiptoes round the topic of "common ownership" - see this excellent overview [The Commons as a new/old paradigm for governance](#) - with a [second section here](#)

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

There is another way 2017 version

This diagram offers a clearer outline of the features of a better system - one called a "solidarity economy".

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.



<http://nomadron.blogspot.com/2011/10/there-is-another-way.html>

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!

I am grateful to a Balkans historian, an Irish economist and an anonymous Canadian for the diagram. Tom Gallagher pointed me to a post on the website of David McWilliams one of whose discussants gave the following info -

Recently, the workers in the Fagor Appliance Factory in Mondragón, Spain, received an 8% cut in pay. This is not unusual in such hard economic times. What is unusual is that the workers voted themselves this pay cut. They could do this because the workers are also the owners of the firm. Fagor is part of the Mondragón Cooperative Corporation, a collection of cooperatives in Spain founded over 50 years ago.

The story of this remarkable company begins with a rather remarkable man, Fr. José Maria Arizmendiarieta, who was assigned in 1941 to the village of Mondragón in the Basque region of Spain. The

Basque region had been devastated by the Spanish Civil War (1936-1938); they had supported the losing side and had been singled out by Franco for reprisals. Large numbers of Basque were executed or imprisoned, and poverty and unemployment remained endemic until the 1950's. In Fr. José's words, "We lost the Civil War, and we became an occupied region."

However, the independent spirit of the Basques proved to be fertile ground for the ideas of Fr. José. He took on the project of alleviating the poverty of the region. For him, the solution lay in the pages of Rerum Novarum, Quadragesimo Anno, and the thinkers who had pondered the principles these encyclicals contained. Property, and its proper use, was central to his thought, as it was to Pope Leo and to Belloc and Chesterton. "Property," Fr. José wrote, "is valued in so far as it serves as an efficient resource for building responsibility and efficiency in any vision of community life in a decentralized form."

José's first step was the education of the people into the Distributist ideal. He became the counselor for the Church's lay social and cultural arm, known as "Catholic Action," and formed the Hezibide Elkartea, The League for Education and Culture, which established a training school for apprentices. He helped a group of these students become engineers, and later encouraged them to form a company of their own on cooperative lines. In 1955, when a nearby stove factory went bankrupt, the students raised \$360,000 from the community to buy it. This first of the co-operatives was named Ulgor, which was an acronym from the names of the founders.

From such humble beginnings, the cooperative movement has grown to an organization that employs over 100,000 people in Spain, has extensive international holdings, has, as of 2007, €33 billion in assets (approximately US\$43 billion), and revenues of €17 billion. 80% of their Spanish workers are also owners, and the [Cooperative is working to extend the cooperative ideal to their foreign subsidiaries](#). 53% of the profits are placed in employee-owner accounts. The cooperatives engage in manufacturing of consumer and capital goods, construction, engineering, finance, and retailing. But aside from being a vast business and industrial enterprise, the corporation is also a social enterprise. It operates social insurance programs, training institutes, research centres, its own school system, and a university, and it does it all without government support.

Mondragón has a unique form of industrial organization. Each worker is a member of two organizations, the General Assembly and the Social Council. The first is the supreme governing body of the corporation, while the second functions in a manner analogous to a labor union. The General Assembly represents the workers as owners, while the Social Council represents the owners as workers. Voting in the General Assembly is on the basis of "one worker, one vote," and since the corporation operates entirely from internal funds, there are no outside shareholders to outvote the workers in their own cooperatives. Moreover, it is impossible for the managers to form a separate class which lords it over both shareholders and workers and appropriates to itself the rewards that belong to both; the salaries of the highest-paid employee is limited to 8 times that of the lowest paid.

Mondragón has a 50 year history of growth that no capitalist organization can match. [They have survived and grown in good times and bad](#). Their success proves that the capitalist model of production, which involves a separation between capital and labor, is not the only model and certainly not the most successful model. The great irony is that Mondragón exemplifies the libertarian ideal in a way that no libertarian system ever does. While the Austrian libertarians can never point to a working model of their system, the Distributists can point to a system that embodies all the objectives of a libertarian economy, but only by abandoning the radical individualism of the Austrians in favor of the principles of solidarity and subsidiarity.

The Cooperative Economy of Emilia-Romagna.

Another large-scale example of Distributism in action occurs in the Emilia-Romagna, the area around Bologna, which is one of 20 administrative districts in Italy. This region has a 100 year

history of cooperativism, but the coops were suppressed in the 1930's by the Fascists. After the war, with the region in ruins, the cooperative spirit was revived and has grown ever since, until now there are about 8,000 coops in the region of every conceivable size and variety. The majority are small and medium size enterprises, and they work in every area of the economy: manufacturing, agriculture, finance, retailing, and social services.

The "Emilian Model" is quite different from that used in Mondragón. While the MCC uses a hierarchical model that resembles a multi-divisional corporation (presuming the divisions of a corporation were free to leave at any time) the Emilian model is one of networking among a large variety of independent firms. These networks are quite flexible, and may change from job to job, combining a high degree of integration for specific orders with a high degree of independence. The cooperation among the firms is institutionalized many in two organizations, ERVET (The Emilia-Romagna Development Agency) and the CNA (The National Confederation of Artisans).

ERVET provides a series of "real" service centers (as opposed to the "government" service centers) to businesses which provide business plan analysis, marketing, technology transfer, and other services. The centers are organized around various industries; CITER, for example, serves the fashion and textile industries, QUASCO serves construction, CEMOTOR serves earth-moving equipment, etc. CNA serves the small artigiani, the artisanal firms with fewer than 18 employees, and where the owner works within the firm, and adds financing, payroll, and similar services to the mix.

The Emilian Model is based on the concept of reciprocity. Reciprocity revolves around the notion of bi-directional transfers; it is not so much a defined exchange relationship with a set price as it is an expectation that what one gets will be proportional to what one gives. The element of trust is very important, which lowers the transaction costs of contracts, lawyers, and the like, unlike modern corporations, where such expenses are a high proportion of the cost of doing business. But more than that, since reciprocity is the principle that normally obtains in healthy families and communities, the economic system reinforces both the family and civil society, rather than works against them.

Space does not permit me to explore the richness of the Emilian Model. I will simply note here some of its economic results. The cooperatives supply 35% of the GDP of the region, and wages are 50% higher than in the rest of Italy. The region's productivity and standard of living are among the highest in Europe. The entrepreneurial spirit is high, with over 8% of the workforce either self-employed or owning their own business. There are 90,000 manufacturing enterprises in the region, certainly one of the densest concentrations per capita in the world. Some have called the Emilian Model "molecular capitalism"; but whatever you call it, it is certainly competitive, if not outright superior, to corporate capitalism.

Other Examples.

There are many other functioning examples of Distributism in action: micro-banking, Employee stock option plans, mutual banks and insurance companies, buyers and producers cooperatives of every sort. This sample should be enough how distributism works in practice. Distributists are often accused of being "back to the land" romantics. The truth is otherwise. There are no functioning examples of a capitalism which operates anywhere near its own principles; there couldn't be,

because the mortality rates are simply too high. Hence, capitalism always relies on government power and money to rescue it from its own excesses. Distributism goes from success to success; capitalism goes from bailout to bailout

.I visited Mondragon in the late 1980s in my capacity as Chairman of a trust which funded community enterprise in the West of Scotland and was deeply impressed - not least by the area's remoteness as I ascended a steep mountain in a hired car to reach the place. We need more celebration of its achievements.

Cooperation

[Together - the rituals, pleasures and politics of cooperation](#) is by the famous sociologist Richard Sennett. For a good sense of both the man and the work, this interview in [Brick Magazine](#) is quite excellent.

Much as I appreciated the freshness and elegance of the discourse - and the references to Tonnies, Robert Owen, Saul Alinsky et al - I could have done with some recognition in the book of the role of cooperatives.

The [Mondragon Cooperative in the Basque country](#) rarely gets proper credit for its [amazing employment record](#) (employing more than 80,000 people in that mountain area). I was sad to see that it [hit a bad patch last year](#) and had to [close one of its affiliates](#). Leonard Woolf's spell-binding 5-volume auto-biography includes his discovery and mapping of the British cooperative movement 100 years ago - and the powerful role played in its educational system by working class women.

It brought back memories of the Cooperative Society in my home town of Greenock in the 1960s - basically the complex of shops, funeral parlour and insurance which was the staple of working class life for so many decades in the West of Scotland; and the great community spirit evident particularly amongst the women in the housing schemes I represented in the late 60s through to 1990. Women were the backbone of the tenant associations and various self-help schemes - including a famous adult education one which is described in this big study - [The Making of an Empowering Profession](#)

That, in turn, got us talking about the absence of such a spirit in 20th century Romania; its decline in the UK; but its continued strength elsewhere.

I remember the Head of the European Delegation in Romania in 1993 handing out to those of us who were working here as consultants summaries of Robert Putnam's new book which traced the differences in the performance of Italian Regional authorities to the habits of centuries. This was a warning that Western "best practice" might have some problems in this part of the world. Putnam's work spawned an incredible academic literature which is summarised in papers such as "[Social Capital in CEEC - a critical assessment and literature review](#)" (CEU 2009) and "[The deficit of cooperative attitudes and trust in post-communism](#)" (2013)

Catherine Murray's 2006 paper "[Social capital and cooperation in CEEC - toward an analytical framework](#)" is, with its various diagrams, probably the most helpful introduction to the issue

There was a (very) brief moment in the early 90s when cooperatives were talked about - at least in some places - as one of the models which might be relevant for the central European economies but market "triumphalism" swept all away....killing an opportunity which has been taken in other countries as well set out in this short paper "[Cooperative Enterprise Development after 30 years of destructive neo-liberalism](#)" [The Resilience of the Cooperative Model](#) is well described in the paper in the link; in "[Coops - pathways to development](#)" and also on the website of the [European Research Institute for cooperative and social enterprise](#) - for example [in this paper](#), See also [Cooperative enterprise building in a better world](#); Terry McDonald (2013).

[Beacons of Hope](#)

Employee-ownership is not the most obvious of subjects to set one's spirits soaring - but some books I've just been reading on this subject are positively inspirational and probably the best guides available for those of us who have been searching for a plausible challenge to the amoral corporate power tearing our societies and planet apart. The books are - [Humanising the Economy](#) by John Restakis (2010); [Beyond the Corporation: Humanity Working](#) by David Erdal (2011); [Owning Our Future: The Emerging Ownership Revolution](#) by Marjorie Kelly (2012)

Each complements the other beautifully - Erdal's book uses the story of the employee buy-out he led in the 1980s of his family's Fife-based paper business (Tullis Russell) as an introduction to employee-owned businesses the world over (amongst many others, the John Lewis Partnership in the UK, the Mondragón group in Spain and the US supermarket chain, Publix) - and then examines the history of the legal structures that underpin modern capitalism and convincingly exposes the gross errors in the conventional models economists use to describe people and businesses (which he labels 'just-so stories') - showing how and why employee-owned businesses are superior to publicly listed companies in every way.

Marjorie Kelly's book helps us understand the "financialisation" which has overtaken companies in the last thirty years - I was able to download the first draft of the book (minus a couple of the chapters) by simply tapping the title and author's name and the preface and first chapter [can be read here](#)

The first section of Erdal's book demolishes the predictions made by traditional economists about the supposed efficiency of the Market (a word that Erdal capitalises) and the supposed flaws of employee-owned concerns:

Very little of the money raised by public shares is invested in strategically building businesses - most of it is used for (often destructive) acquisitions and lining the pockets of shareholders and top management. For companies to flourish in the long term, employees must have a real sense of ownership. No management techniques can substitute for the rights and benefits of genuine ownership, but even the managers of employee-owned concerns need to work hard to ensure workers feel involved.

Communication is key: managers must make information fully and openly available, must listen, and must allow employees to make contributions to improving how things are done. Although employee-owners need leaders, given the same quality of leadership employee-owned businesses always outperform those owned by outsiders. The former are more productive, they survive better in bad times, they have lower employee turnover and absenteeism and they give better service (the top-rated companies for service in both the UK and the USA are employee-owned).

Employees in employee-owned companies learn more participation skills, they are better trained, they contribute more innovative ideas, they implement change quicker, and they are wealthier, with communities in which they live benefiting from both money and skills. Many economists are blind to all the above, repeatedly citing old papers based on nothing but theory, and falsely claiming that such organisations will be overwhelmed by free-riders, that decision-making will be impracticably slow, and that employee-owners will forever be falling out with each other. These unevincenced views of economists place significant obstacles in the way of those hoping to set up employee-owned concerns.

As he puts it -

'Ironically, capitalism itself is built on the idea that owners will work more energetically and creatively, and with greater commitment, than people who are employed by others. Instead of following through [this] logic [...], the owners of capital [...] have built company structures in which employees have none of the participation of ownership: they have no right to influence the choice of leader or the policies set, and no right to participate in the wealth that they create together. The vast majority of people are systematically deprived of any ownership stake. It is as if they are seen as coming from a different species, insensitive to the galvanising effect of ownership.'

The second section describes the horror of working for publicly traded companies subject to so-called 'market discipline' and contrasts this with the experience of employee-owners, and shows why 'market discipline' is powerless to curb excessive executive pay and does nothing to promote stability and innovation. It also relates the jaw-dropping history of the employee contract (which Erdal contends violates what should be inalienable rights) and of the present economic system - rigged from the outset in the favour of the rich and powerful.

The impact of asset-stripping by private equity investors on the employees and customers of Debenhams, as well as its suppliers, is powerfully conveyed. After all but destroying staff morale, delaying payment for suppliers, decreasing investment in new stores and the refurbishment of old ones, and making various cut-backs and redundancies, investors left the company nearly £1 billion in debt.

.....Crucial to the success of all employee-owned businesses are consultation and keeping employees informed: 'If it feels to the managers like overkill - as if they are giving out too much information - then they may be close to giving out enough'. People must also be allowed to

make a difference, and increased efficiency should not result in people being sacked - they can be redeployed or given further training. Although hierarchies do exist in employee-owned concerns, their purpose is simply 'to enable the front-line workers to be wholly effective'.

Sustaining employee ownership requires some thought: 'The structuring of the ownership is of crucial importance in ensuring longevity. When all the shares are held by the individual employees a substantial 'repurchase liability' - the need eventually to find the cash to buy back the shares - builds up.' Erdal discusses this topic in some depth, suggesting various alternatives and criticising US ESOPs (Employee Stock Ownership Plans, where shareholding trusts take the form of pension funds) as being 'vulnerable to Wall Street types'. He champions the capital account system used by Spain's Mondragón group, and urges tax concessions to support this.

However employee-owned businesses are structured, Erdal believes that in the end they can 'be made effective only through the courage, energy and personal ethics of those involved'. Nonetheless, he maintains that they are certainly less vulnerable to abuse of power by CEOs than public corporations where 'CEOs are running away with the loot'.....

.....Contrary to economists' predictions, reinvestment is not a problem for employee-owned concerns as people generally 'want to keep the company strong for their own sakes and they want to pass it on strong to the next generation'. As Erdal says, 'They are much more than the money-grubbing automata of economists' models'.

If by this stage you are still not persuaded of the virtues of employee-ownership, perhaps you will find Erdal's measurement of the wider effects of employee ownership on communities in Italy convincing. Erdal compared three similar towns, differing only with regard to the proportion of their residents working for employee-owned concerns. He found that where many people worked for such businesses, residents lived a lot longer, they enjoyed larger and more supportive social networks, they perceived political authorities as being more on their side, more voted, they believed that domestic violence was less prevalent, they donated more blood, their children stayed at school longer and did better, and, 'to a radically greater extent', they continued being trained and educated throughout their lives. Most intriguingly, they apparently didn't bother buying big cars to show off their wealth, despite having higher disposable incomes! Employee-ownership kills conspicuous consumption?

In Praise of....Political Economy

Trust the Germans to spot a winner! The title of Mark Blyth's 2013 book - [Austerity](#) - was hardly calculated to bring me to orgasm but its subtitle - "[history of a dangerous idea](#)" - should have told me that this was no ordinary pseudo-technical stuff. It took author Mark Blyth's [electrifying youtube performances](#) (a more sedate performance is a recent [presentation at the University of Glasgow](#)) to bring [the book](#) back down from my shelves for more careful reading.

What I found is a book I would rate as the best read of the new century!

Blyth is that rarity - a Scot and political scientist (but with an American post-graduate specialism in "economic ideas and political change in the 20th century") whose book reminds us of the Scottish tradition of political economy. Since 2009 he has been

Professor of International Political Economy at the Ivy League [Brown University](#) - quite an achievement for a Dundee lad from a poor working class background who generally pays warm tribute to the support he owes to the welfare state....

The book can be read in its entirety at [Austerity - the history of a dangerous idea](#) and you can get a good sense of the respect with which its being treated by colleagues in [the special symposium Comparative European Politics](#) ran on the book in 2013 - with [this being Blyth's powerful response](#)

For those impatient with academic jousting, Le Monde Diplomatique [ran this good summary](#)

Blyth's book is divided into two parts. The first is an account of the crisis, starting with the United States and moving on to Europe. Blyth's narrative does not drown in financial jargon. He sets out to explain as simply as possible what the jargon means and what role it played in the crisis.

For those interested in understanding collateral deals in US repo markets, the structure of mortgage-backed derivatives, repo transactions, correlation and tail risk, Blyth's book is a good place to start.

His explanation of the crisis is compelling: innovatory financial instruments were allied with a set of ideas about how the economy works, and in particular about how one should evaluate risk in the economy, which together contributed to a build-up of risks within the global financial system and their explosion in 2008. These ideas also facilitated the transfer of the crisis from the US to Europe.

Blyth dismisses the popular notion that the crisis is somehow the result of the moral failing of particular individuals — the 'Fred Goodwin problem'. It is, for Blyth, a failure of the private sector as a whole. That it has been paid for by the public purse can only be explained by the contradictory set of ideas, which prevail today, about the dangers of state intervention. It is these ideas that Blyth calls 'austerity'.

The second half of the book is a great primer in political economy. Describing the intellectual origins of the idea of austerity, Blyth gives us potted accounts of the ideas of Hume, Locke, Smith and Ricardo. He ties these ideas together with political developments, presenting us with a picture of the 20th century that sees Keynesian ideas fighting it out with older ideas about austerity and government probity. A short-lived victory for Keynesian economics after the Second World War was eventually overthrown by a mixture of economic crises, public choice theories of democracy and the rational expectations revolution in economic theory. This journey through the idea of austerity ends with a chapter on its implementation.

This is a devastating account of how attempts at putting the idea into practice — from the struggle of governments with the Gold Standard in the 1920s and 1930s to the travails of more recent 'austerity successes' like Sweden and Ireland — never seems to work.

But it took those canny Germans to appreciate Blyth's genius. Given the choice last year to award a prize for the economics writing of the year which included Thomas Pikety's highly profiled (but, I suspect, seldom read) "Capital", they chose Mark Blyth's "Austerity" -

for [reasons they explain here](#)

"Political economy" sank out of fashion in the 1970s as the pretensions of economics to be treated as a science overwhelmed academia.....Blyth's book (and chair at an Ivy league University) is yet another welcome sign of the grip of "scientific" pretensions being broken.....

Part II

In the 1980s, Margaret Thatcher introduced us to TINA - her refrain that "there is no alternative" (to the liberalisation of national and global markets).

Social democratic parties bought into that argument and have shown no inclination to rethink policies since the global crisis began almost a decade ago. Jeremy Corbyn's Labour party, I grant you, is one exception - but has attracted vitriolic attack on the basis that there can be no going back to the world of the 1960s and 1970s.

The argument generally consists of the following elements -

- The state can't get out of the immense debt which it has taken on by rescuing the banks
- Although the operations of privatised industries are subject to increasing attack, the idea of reprivatisation is rarely presented in social democratic programmes
- The ideology of greed has become so legitimised, lives so atomised and the commodification trend so strong that notions of collective and cooperative effort seem more and more unrealistic
- We can't stop automation
- Only eccentrics question the worship of growth

Much wailing and gnashing of teeth in the social democratic camp has so far produced little to convince - let alone inspire - people that a feasible programme exists which could attract electoral support. This short 2015 [Compass article](#) and book [Rebuilding social democracy - core principles of the centre left](#) ed Keven Hickson (2016) give a fair sense of both the mood and policy drift.....

Of course, convincing programmes need to be based on a sound story.....about what exactly has been going on in the post-war period? It's clearly not enough simply to blame neo-liberalism.....

This week I watched of the best narratives I have so far come across - [Global Trumpism](#) - presented by Mark Blyth, author of *Austerity - history of a dangerous idea* which I wrote about [earlier in the year](#).

Blyth's style of historical ideas, colloquial language and slides is a gripping one which puts other economists into the shade....

His starting point is the growth of populism throughout Europe and now the States and the question whether (as I tended to suggest in [one blogpost on Brexit](#)) it is a reaction to immigration trends and fears - or has a more basic economic explanation.... He shows how

the location of Brexit and Trump supporters correlates with the devastation caused by globalisation and recent Chinese imports; job insecurity et al - but then uses the largely [unknown figure of Michael Kalecki](#) to show how the post-war Keynesian consensus unravelled in the 1970s

Kalecki had [warned as far back as 1943](#) of a central flaw in the Keynes' model - which duly presented itself in the 1970s with the arrival of serious inflation which was dealt with by first monetarist and then neo-liberal policies. The post-war regime slowly gave way to one of secular disinflation; capital assertiveness; global markets; strong central banks; and weak trade unions and parliament

As befits a political economist, Blyth wants to know about losers and winners - none of this cosy nonsense about equilibrium....and uses Branko Milanovic's slide of global trends in income distribution [showing the shape of an elephant](#) to back up his argument about global trumpism....

He returns, finally, to his initial point in exploring the various economic options we seem to have -

- The sort of spending on infrastructure which Trump's campaign envisaged? (probable but not with anticipated results)
- the return of "good jobs"? (unlikely)
- getting corporations and the rich to pay more tax? ("fat chance"!)
- "technological disruption"? ([the digital disruption has already happened](#))

All in all a really thought-provoking presentation.....from a Professor of Political Economy - a discipline which hopefully will be finding a proper place for itself after almost a century of neglect.....

historical note

The phrase *économie politique* actually first appeared in France in 1615 with a book by [Antoine de Montchrétien](#) - *Traité de l'économie politique* - with the world's first professorship in political economy established in 1754 at the University of Naples, Vienna University following suit soon thereafter (in 1763). And it was to be [Thomas Malthus](#) who, in 1805, became England's first professor of political economy, at the [East India Company College](#).

As it happens. I graduated (in 1964) with an MA (Hons) in "Political Economy and Politics" fromno less than the University of Glasgow where [Adam Smith occupied a chair](#) (in Moral Philosophy) from 1753 for more than a decade - attracting students from many parts of Europe to his lectures which increasingly focused on the causes of national wealth. He then acted as tutor on the Grand Tour (engaging then with the French physiocrats) but returned after a few years to Kirkcaldy to write his magnum opus "[The Wealth of Nations](#)" which appeared in 1776.

The Glasgow course in Political Economy must be one of the longest running - it disappeared (as a name) only in the early 1990s....

Populist- and Proud of it

Since 2011, I've blogged about populism four or five times - mainly in a neutral definitional way. But a combination last week of a couple of articles in [The Guardian](#) and [Open Democracy](#) with my reading of R Eatwell and M Goodwin's recent little Pelican book [National Populism - the revolt against liberal democracy](#); (2017) got me into surfing mode on the subject and to some disturbing thoughts.....

Let me start with a summary

- Talk of "populism" surfaces whenever things seem to be slipping from the control of "ruling elites"
- Such talk has occurred every 30 years or so in the past 150 years - [the 1880s in the US and Russia](#); the 1930s in Europe and Latin America; the [late 1960s globally](#); the late 1990s in Europe
- as a professional and intellectual discipline, Political Science has adopted a rather disdainful view of democracy and a "scientist" approach to its methodology - marginalising those few academics with serious interests in notions of the "public good" being embedded in government programmes
- The US tradition of populism has never died - whereas the European tradition is sceptical at best (with the exception of the French whose celebration of revolt seems part of their DNA)
- But the younger contemporary American academics seem to have lost their sense of history and have produced rather aggressive celebrations of liberalism ([Y Mounk](#))

The reader should now be warned that the next few paras represent a rather jaundiced take on academia.... As a social "scientist", I have long had a healthy skepticism about the overconfident claims of particularly economists - and have even been known (as long ago as 2010) to [challenge the political scientists for hiding their heads in the sand](#). Not for nothing is [Social Sciences as Sorcery](#); Stanislaw Andreski (1972) one of my favourite books - and I was delighted to be able to download it in full yesterday.....

2008, of course, should have been the death knell for economics since it had succumbed some decades earlier to a [highly-simplified and unrealistic model of the economy](#) which was then starkly revealed in all its nakedness..... Steve Keen was one of the first economists to break ranks very publicly way back in 2001 and to set out an alternative - [Debunking Economics - the naked emperor dethroned](#).

This coincided [with economics students in Paris objecting to the homogeneity of syllabi](#) and reaching out to others - creating in the next 15 years [a movement which has become global](#). This is a [good presentation on the issues](#) (from 2012) and I am now reading an excellent little Penguin book [The Econocracy - the perils of leaving economics to the experts](#) by Joe Earle, Cahal Moran and Zach Ward-Perkins (2017) from their experience of stirring things up on the Manchester University economics programme. The book's sub-title says it all!

Dani Rodrik is one of the few economists with a global reputation to support them ([Ha-Yoon Chang](#) is another) and indeed published an important book recently reviewing the state of economics

- [Economics Rules - the rights and the wrongs of the dismal science](#); (2016) which was nicely [reviewed here](#)

The [Financial Times recently reviewed](#) several other such books - so the situation is not beyond repair but we have to be realistic. **Academic economists have invested a lifetime's reputation and energy in offering the courses they do - and neither can nor will easily offer programmes to satisfy future student demands for relevance and pluralism.....** chances are that the next cohort will be more pliable...

Academic Political Science may not have quite the same level of pressure to change as in Economics but increasing questions are nonetheless being asked of it about the implications of the [populist zeitgeist](#) for the celebration of liberal democracy which masquerades as political science departments of US universities.

So what does all this mean for the present anguishing over populism?

I graduated in the 1960s as a "Labour" populist - although [I never expressed it quite like that!](#) I was schooled in the writings of RH Tawney, Ivan Illich, Paolo Freire, Saul Alinsky, Peter Marris and Martin Ryan; and inspired at various times by such distinctive and competing Labourites as Nye Bevan, John Strachey, GDH Cole, Hugh Gaitskell; RHS Crossman, Tony Crosland and John Mackintosh. The result of such a mish-mash was a pragmatic centralist with an anarchist streak.....I was one of the contributors to the famous 1975 [Red Paper on Scotland](#) and had sympathies with the alternative economic strategy and the Lucas Plan

And, despite the senior position I had reached in the 80s, I remained committed to ensuring that that the ordinary, decent citizen's voice and collective efforts were respected and encouraged. I may not have been a Bennite but I respected the man.

I left the UK in late 1990 and therefore never knew New Labour and its insidious contribution to the current cynicism about politics - Neil Kinnock may have been the Labour Leader but John Smith was the solid leader-in-waiting...From 1978-1990 the articles of the maverick [Marxism Today](#) journal plotted the various ideas absorbing the British Left during that critical period. Gordon Brown even [contributed a piece](#) (in late 1989) which indicated if not populism a strong ideological flavour..

And Jeremy Corbyn is, of course, and always has been an ideologue - not a populist. But the fascinating [2017 British Labour Party Manifesto](#) also has a strong populist streak...It's a pity that so few of the chattering political and economic classes in Britain have yet been able to produce books which pick up the analysis from the point we had reached 30 years ago before New Labour seduced and traduced the Labour tradition....

Populism Resource

<http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/lsereviewofbooks/2019/01/30/book-review-national-populism-the-revolt-against-liberal-democracy-by-roger-eatwell-and-matthew-goodwin/>

<https://nomadron.blogspot.com/2018/12/the-road-tosomewhere.html>

<http://nomadron.blogspot.com/2018/11/controlling-masses.html>

<http://nomadron.blogspot.com/2018/11/we-need-to-talk-aboutpower.html>

<https://nomadron.blogspot.com/2016/11/populism-what-is-it.html>

<https://nomadron.blogspot.com/2014/02/collapse-of-honourable-profession.html>

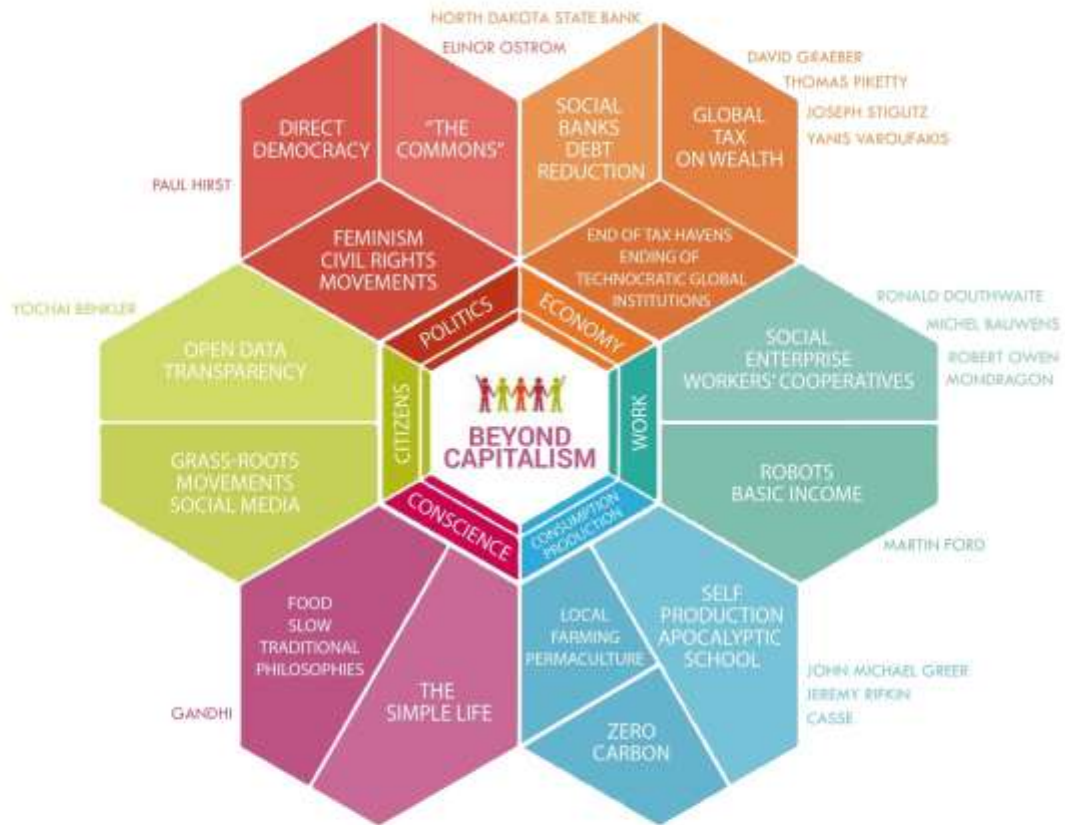
<https://nomadron.blogspot.com/2014/02/what-is-populism.html>
<https://nomadron.blogspot.com/2011/04/populism.html>

<https://www.jacobinmag.com/2018/12/guardian-populism-europe-cas-mudde-hillary-clinton-immigration-tony-blair>
<https://www.jacobinmag.com/2018/06/for-a-left-populism-mouffe-review>
<https://www.jacobinmag.com/2018/01/populism-douglas-hofstadter-donald-trump-democracy>
<http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/lsereviewofbooks/2018/08/29/book-review-for-a-left-populism-by-chantal-mouffe/>
<https://nplusonemag.com/online-only/online-only/populism-without-the-people/>
<https://nplusonemag.com/online-only/online-only/zombie-liberalism/>
<https://globalreports.columbia.edu/books/the-populist-explosion/> John Judis (2016)
<http://counterpoint.uk.com/publications/>
<https://www.nybooks.com/articles/1972/07/20/populism-socialism-mcGovernism/>
<https://www.nybooks.com/articles/1976/10/28/the-promise-of-populism/>
<http://berlin.wolf.ox.ac.uk/lists/bibliography/bib111bLSE.pdf>

populism

<https://nomadron.blogspot.com/2016/11/populism-what-is-it.html>
<https://nomadron.blogspot.com/2014/02/collapse-of-honourable-profession.html>
<https://nomadron.blogspot.com/2014/02/what-is-populism.html>
<https://nomadron.blogspot.com/2011/04/populism.html>

Part IV Changing the World?



How I now try to explain the [process of change was most succinctly put in this post](#) -

Some time ago, I developed what I called [the "opportunistic" or "windows of opportunity" theory of change](#) against what I started to call "impervious regimes" ie so confident of the lack of challenge to their rule that they had become impervious to their citizens

-

"Most of the time our systems seem impervious to change - but always (and suddenly) an opportunity arises.

*Those who care about the future of their society, take the time and trouble to prepare for these "windows of opportunity". And the preparation is about **analysis, mobilisation and trust.***

- *It is about us **caring enough about our organisation and society** to be willing to speak out about the need for change.*
- *It is about **taking the trouble to think and read about ways to improve things** - and helping **create and run networks of change-agents.***
- *And it is about establishing a **personal reputation for probity and good judgement** that people **will follow your lead when that window of opportunity arises**".*

Quinn's "Entering the fundamental state of leadership"

But I can trace the thinking back some 50 years to my first experience of community [action and the questions, reading and understanding it subsequently generated.](#)

Your recent personal experience and analysis of electioneering in Bulgaria is indeed quite fascinating and I'm sure you're right that local media and blogs could be doing more to help activists.....but in a *non-partisan* way. And I would certainly be happy to explore how I might help in any such endeavour...

We are now much more aware of the interventions of foreign money - particularly US - I vividly remember the young Americans I came across in Romania in the early 90s training activists in electoral campaigns - but showing absolutely no interest in the policy content or context.

For them it was all about winning power - not what could and should be done with that power.

Obama, as we all know, was briefly a community organiser in Chicago where [Saul Alinsky](#) was his inspiration. Nowadays it [is Gene Sharp](#).

As you know, I am these days much more attracted to the work of Robert Quinn whose [Building the Bridge as you walk on it - a guide for leading change](#); I'm about to reread...

Post Capitalism is here?	
The Global Minotaur	
A better economics	
How will it all end?	
I have a little list	
Why the reluctance to seek consensus?	
Time to reclaim public services	

Post-Capitalism is here?

How might one read most beneficially a book which, from my google links, looks to be one of the most appreciated and reviewed of the past decade?

I was unable to apply [my litmus test](#) to Paul Mason's [Post Capitalism - a Guide to our Future](#) since it lacks a bibliography - but I knew enough about it to have confidence that it would repay my study - I had, after all, thoroughly enjoyed his [Meltdown - the end of the age of greed](#) (2009) and his earlier [Live Working or Die Fighting - how the working class went global](#) in 2007.

This is someone who has combined an early career as a militant with a later one as both a print and television journalist - reporting on political and industrial struggles against capital...

The early pages of reading (the opening "Neoliberalism is broken" chapter) produced my usual squiggles which indicate appreciation but my attention started to wander in the middle of the subsequent discussion of the Kondratieff waves - despite the earlier nice little intellectual vignettes of people such as Marx, Rosa Luxembourg, Rudolf Hilferding and Jeno Varga.

So I started to google for the reviews since these give me the questions which ensure that I am reading more closely. And I came across at least 30 quite long reviews of the book to which I will give links at the end of my comments.....

Chris Mullin was a contrarian Labour MP who [wrote a couple of amusing memoirs](#) about his life in parliament and was therefore someone I felt would have some sympathy for Mason's book but [his review is a tough one](#) -

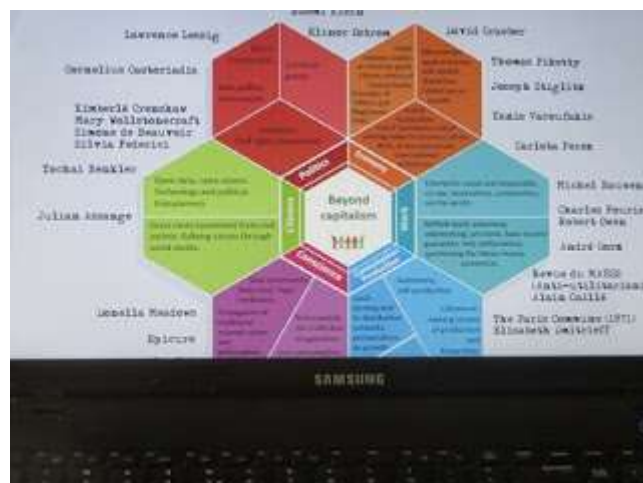
one has to plough through more than 200 pages of analysis in the course of which the author examines one by one the various economic theories advanced by 19th- and 20th-century political philosophers and various IT gurus....

At no point on this long road are there any references to the impact of majority affluence on politics in the developed world. Nikolai Kondratieff (inventor of the wave theory of capitalism) occupies almost an entire column in the index. [JK Galbraith](#) and [Tony Crosland](#) do not merit a single mention....(Crosland actually has one!)

We have to wait until page 263, a chapter headed "Project Zero", to discover what the author has in store for us.

Methinks that Mullin is a tad too impatient - analysis and diagnosis are actually rather important!

The first part of the book ends with a series of annotated graphs which Mason suggests best summarise the massive shifts in debt, performance and inequality which characterise the decades of the last "wave". I really had to concentrate to get the points being made in the graphs. "Prophets of Postcapitalism" introduces the second section of the book (at page 109), paying tribute to the questions posed by the great [Peter Drucker](#) (then in his 90s) in his little 1993 book "[The Post-Capitalist World](#)" and to others who have understood the significance of the technological and social changes which have been shattering our worlds in recent decades eg Jeremy Rifkin, with his 2014 book [The Zero Marginal Cost Society](#)



It is at this stage that I needed one of these maps which identify the link between various intellectual schools - [such as this one](#) from the very [useful Commons Transition website](#). In that context, [this article from Open Democracy](#) seemed to me to set the Mason book in an appropriate context

For those with more patience, I came across at least 30 quite long reviews - in a few cases of more than 6 pages long...

- Ann Pettifor, for example, prepared a [very thoughtful commentary on the book](#) for a discussion she had with the author - suggesting, for example, "we are not the subject of impersonal forces but have human agency" and that capital gains (rather than rate of profit) is the main motive for owners...

- a long and rather [pedantic Real-World Economics review](#) focuses on the book's main thesis about low marginal costs and the new sharing economy

- Prospect gave [Mason an interview](#)
- one academic devoted 50 pages to his analysis - in 3 separate parts The [first part here](#), I can actually understand. The longer parts [here](#) and [here](#) I have to confess I find largely incomprehensible
One of the best reviews is one [from an Australian green](#) Senator and this one is good on [some of the book's contradictions](#)

My Assessment

I have given Mason's book the space I have simply because it is one of these rare books which actually tries to do justice to the sort of questions we non-specialists have about the world these days.....But the book fails to live up to the promise of its subtitle. Indeed at least one third of the book is actually devoted to writers and events of more than 100 years ago. Now I am someone who deeply respects the contribution which long-dead writers and people made and which is too easily forgotten - but I do draw the line at suggestions that we have something to learn from the travails of the early soviets of the Russian revolution (p267).

And it is nothing short of breath-taking that his reference to the potential of cooperatives and social enterprise (which employ tens of millions workers globally) dismisses them as "experimental and small-scale" and says that "with the exception of thinkers such as Bauwens and Wark, few have bothered to ask what a new system of governance and regulation might look like" (p 267).

But I am grateful to the book for drawing my attention to the writings of these "thinkers" one of whom is the founder of the [p2p Foundation](#) and the other the author of a famous [Hacker's Manifesto](#). Although I don't find their accounts coherent or easy to place in the wider literature - they seem the scribbles of young geeks....

The other text, however, which Mason references and of which I was also unaware, is much more serious - it is Jeremy Rifkin's 2014 book [The zero marginal cost society - the internet of things, the collaborative commons and the eclipse of capitalism](#) (the link gives the google book). This does seem a sustained examination of the phenomenon which, despite the title of Mason's book, he fails (in my view) to treat properly..... Rifkin [summarises his thinking in this article](#) and [here](#)
There is also [this review](#); this [interview](#) and a long review from the [Ken Wilber integral school](#). Rifkin's book does, however, get a fairly severe mauling [from the right](#) - the [left](#) - and [others in between](#)

In short I find Mason's book a bit of [a Curate's egg](#) - ie good and bad....and suffering badly from the fault to which I draw increasing attention - not even trying to build on the relevant work of others...Given the scale of comment the book has attracted I have tried to gather other reviews together in this table. But be warned - the leftist reviews are long-winded and often opaque.....

A sample of other reviews

Source	description	URL
LA Review of Books		https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/is-there-life-after-capitalism/#!
In Defence of Marxism	Far left UK journal	Positive review at http://www.marxist.com/the-sharing-economy-the-future-of-jobs-and-postcapitalism-part-three.htm
Counterpunch	US leftist journal	Critical but clearly-written review https://www.counterpunch.org/2015/09/16/have-we-really-entered-the-age-of-post-capitalism/
The Conversation	Journal which tries to combine academia and journalism	https://theconversation.com/after-capitalism-what-comes-next-for-a-start-ethics-44975
Counterfire	Leftist UK journal	http://www.counterfire.org/articles/book-reviews/18008-paul-mason-postcapitalism-a-guide-to-our-future
Alternet	US alt media	http://www.alternet.org/world/post-capitalism-utopia-bit-farce
Marx and Philosophy	UK book review	http://marxandphilosophy.org.uk/reviewofbooks/reviews/2015/2008
Green European Journal		http://www.greeneuropeanjournal.eu/paul-mason-post-capitalism-a-guide-to-the-future/
Left Com	International communist tendency	Opaque review - http://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2016-02-21/post-capitalism-via-the-internet-according-to-paul-mason-%E2%80%93-dream-or-reality
People and Nature	UK socialist blog	Long winded review - https://peopleandnature.wordpress.com/2016/04/04/i-have-seen-the-techno-future-and-im-not-so-sure-it-works/
7 Circles	Investment journal	http://the7circles.uk/the-end-of-capitalism-postcapitalism-by-paul-mason/
Open Democracy	UK website	https://www.opendemocracy.net/transformation/paul-tritschler/is-there-life-after-capitalism
LRB	UK book review	http://www.lrb.co.uk/v38/n13/owen-hatherley/one-click-at-a-time
Socialist network	European leftist group	http://socialistnetwork.org/book-review-mick-brooks-evaluates-paul-masons-postcapitalism-a-guide-to-our-future/
Popular resistance	US leftist group	Background sketched here - https://www.popularresistance.org/post-capitalism-rise-of-the-collaborative-commons/
Fast Company	Commercial site	https://www.fastcompany.com/3056483/welcome-to-the-post-work-economy

The Global Minotaur

A blog with a good search facility is a fantastic resource - able to summon up a vaguely-remembered reference. A few days ago, I realized that I had forgotten the full significance of Nixon's decision in 1971 to break the connection with gold which had been agreed in 1944 at the Bretton Woods Conference. I remembered that Yanis Varoufakis had written a powerful book about it in 2011 - [The Global Minotaur - America, the true origins of the financial crisis and the future of the western economy](#) - but it was inaccessible up in my mountain house. I googled....to discover that the entire book is now available to be downloaded (just click the title).

Varoufakis is a Greek economist - which offers two reasons for expecting a badly-written book....economists seem almost genetically incapable of expressing themselves clearly; and English is not his natural language. But the book is a joy to read - not least when he makes use of Greek mythology to illustrate a point. He clearly had good proof-readers....

I generally try to keep notes on key books - which are better written in hand than cut and pasted (our memory more easily retains what we take the trouble to write out in long-hand). But all too often I succumb to the temptation of cut and paste - as now from a [very useful summary of the book](#)

The theme of the book is very well laid out in the introductory chapter. The author looks at six explanations which have been offered for the crisis but finds them useful but insufficient:

- (i) a failure to understand risk;
- (ii) regulatory capture;
- (iii) irrepressible greed;
- (iv) cultural origins (Anglo-Celtic beliefs in flexible labour markets, etc.);
- (v) toxic theory (efficient markets hypothesis, rational expectations, etc.);
- (vi) systemic failure of capitalism, the role of the USA in financing its debts and deficits from the surpluses of Germany and Japan.

Chapter 2, 'Laboratories of the Future', provides a brief historical account of the development of capitalism à la Marx, the role of crises, Goodwin's predator prey model, and the role of finance in modern capitalism with the ability to create bubbles, and the end of the Gold Standard after the 1929 Great Crash.

Chapter 3, 'The Global Plan', provides a historical account of the Marshall plan to save global capitalism, the breakdown of the Bretton Woods agreement, the ending of the US dollar's convertibility to gold in 1971, and the 'surplus recycling mechanism': the absorption of surpluses created in Japan and Germany by the USA. Varoufakis argues that the European Union was a clever US plan to bring Europe into the US axis of economic influence. He ignores the view that the EU was meant as a third force: to stand against the USA (a view strongly held by Charles de Gaulle) and as a bulwark against communism.

Chapter 4, 'The Global Minotaur', discusses the role of the USA in the global economy. The author argues that the major flaw in the Bretton Woods agreement (similar to a major flaw in the European Union) was that there was no automatic global surplus recycling mechanism. In the early post war years, the USA recycled its surplus dollars to Japan and Germany (especially) under the Marshall Plan. However, after the end of convertibility of the dollar to gold, the USA had increasing deficits financing wars in Vietnam and South East Asia. Varoufakis argues that the USA persuaded OPEC to raise oil prices (as they are denominated in US dollars) which would increase the demand for US dollars.

The rest of the world continued to finance the US deficits as the US dollar was still regarded as a reserve currency (although later the Europeans would have liked to make the Euro the reserve currency).

The US economy was expanding, with stagnating real wages and increasing profitability that led to an inflow of foreign capital. The cheap loans that the USA made to Soviet satellites in the 1960s became a burden when interest rates soared under Volcker's regime of high interest rates. This, Varoufakis suggests, led to discontent in the Soviet satellite states that eventually led to the demise of the Soviet Union. This is an interesting twist on the usual interpretation of history. In

Chapter 5, **'The Beast's Handmaidens'**, Varoufakis argues that the Europeans, Irish, British, and Japanese were in awe of the American 'great moderation' and happily followed US supply-side economic policies. Wall Street, is for Varoufakis, a ringleader of the handmaidens engaged in a roller coaster ride of mergers and take-overs.

The development of various 'clever' derivatives (CDOs and CDSs), that were supposed to remove (reduce?) risk from financial markets, expanded at an almost exponential rate. This expansion helped the asset price bubble supported by 'toxic theory' that suggested that markets were efficient and bubbles did not exist. Free markets reigned supreme with the growth of Thatcherite and Reaganite governments.

Huge capital flows from Germany, Japan, and China fed the financial booms in Wall Street and supported the twin deficits. In 2005 Paul Volcker had foreseen the impossibility of a never ending increase in debts being funded by foreign capital flows: 'The difficulty is that this seemingly comfortable pattern can't go on forever' (p. 145). Curiously, the author does not discuss the Asian Crisis of 1997 which was a fore-runner to the GFC.

Chapter 6, **'The Crash'**, provides a blow by blow account of the early stages of the crisis in 2007, the collapse of Bear Stearns, problems faced by BNP Paribas, and the Swiss UBS. In December 2007, President Bush (a free marketeer par excellence) intervenes to save house owners from foreclosure and the Federal Reserve (the Fed) steps in providing (almost) unlimited credit to the financial system. By September 2008, Lehman Brothers collapses as the US government refuses to save it. This is often taken to be the start of the GFC. Several European banks and finance houses that held 'toxic assets' are in trouble and the whole western world is in a tailspin, with central banks suddenly doing an about-turn on monetary policy (usually by interest rate management) and no longer targeting inflation. During the crisis, several banks (and car manufacturers) were nationalised but as things got better the banks were denationalised and back in the driving seats! 'In short, socialism died during the Global Minotaur's Golden Age, and capitalism was quietly bumped off the moment the beast ceased to rule over the world economy. In its place we have a new social system: bankruptocracy — rule by bankrupted banks ...' (p. 167).

The financial crisis spread all over the western world with declining GDP and increasing unemployment, and even the developing world found its growth rates slowing down. Tiny little Iceland went through a dramatic crash! European Union countries, especially Portugal, Ireland, Italy, Greece, and Spain (PIIGS), have been experiencing a continuing recession with their banks and financial houses facing bankruptcy, and the existence of the Euro is under continuing threat. The UK disposed of its Labour Government and replaced it with a coalition of the Conservatives and Social Democrats, which imposed austerity measures that have led to a double dip recession. These economic crises have led to political crises, and that is still continuing.

Chapter 7, **'The Handmaidens Strike Back'**, turns to the methods employed by the USA and European Central Bank to attempt to rescue countries in crisis and the banking system. Varoufakis argues that the Geithner-Summers plan of 2009 of creating a simulated market for CDOs was essentially a method of helping the banks to convert toxic assets into 'clean' assets helped by the Fed and the Treasury.

Chapter 8, **'The Minotaur's Global Legacy'**, discusses the symbiotic relationship between Japan and the USA. The post-war growth of the Japanese economy was sponsored by the USA, Japanese exports were

purchased by the USA, and in return the Japanese recycled their surpluses by investing in the USA. The Japanese boom came to an end with a collapse in the housing and asset price bubbles in the early nineteen-nineties, and it faced a liquidity trap situation. (It is interesting that the Japanese experience of loosening monetary policy for several years did not help the economy to come out of the recession. It apparently did not warn the IMF and other central bankers that simply loosening monetary policy would not cure the underlying problems of the global crisis.) The European Union provided Germany with an expanding market for its exports, leading to current account deficits in the other European countries. This was continued with the introduction of a fixed exchange rate within the European Union by the introduction of the Euro (except for the few countries that refused to join, especially the UK).

The US financial crisis spread throughout Europe, but the policies introduced by the European Central Bank failed to stave off disaster for Greece, and now other countries. This, he argues, is because there was no 'surplus recycling mechanism' in the European Union with fixed exchange rates within the Euro countries: the large surpluses of Germany were not being recycled to the remaining members of the EU.

His solution to the EU crisis is based on three elements: first, the ECB would assist banks to write off the debts of deficit countries; secondly, the ECB would take on significant amounts of debt financed by Euro Bonds (not individual country bonds); thirdly, the European Investment Bank would invest in the deficit countries. The author does not discuss the necessity of a unified fiscal authority that acts as an equalising agent to help out the poorer states in the Union. The chapter ends with a brief discussion about whether China would be able to save the world by providing an expanding market.

Chapter 9, 'A Future without the Minotaur?' argues that the crucial problem of the world economy is the absence of a 'global surplus recycling mechanism' (GRSM). For some time, the USA managed to have a surplus which it recycled to Japan and Germany (post-World War 2), then when it created large deficits with the wars in South East Asia, it left the gold standard and was being supported by the surpluses of Japan and Germany. But as a result of the crisis the US economy contracted and that affected the German, Japanese and Chinese economies. Can the Chinese economy take over the role of the Global Minotaur (the USA)? His argument is a loud, NO! He favours Keynes's policy prescription in the 1940s of an International Clearing House with its own currency, the Bancor.

Other reviews

<https://nomadron.blogspot.com/2017/08/an-economic-thriller.html>

<https://www.salon.com/2018/06/09/how-the-greek-debt-crisis-exposed-the-global-economy-as-a-giant-con-and-led-to-donald-trump/>

<https://www.yanisvaroufakis.eu/2014/05/22/a-review-of-the-global-minotaur-2nd-edition-from-an-australian-perspective-by-paul-tyson/#top>

A better economics

No sooner was my post about The Global Minotaur up than I found another of Yanis Varoufakis' books freely available on the internet - this time a very original [Foundation of Economics - a beginner's companion](#) (1997). I had a post last month about populism - and readers may therefore have missed a little section buried there dealing with the state of economics

2008, of course, should have been the death knell for economics since it had succumbed some decades earlier to a [highly-simplified and unrealistic model of the economy](#) which was then starkly revealed in all its nakedness.....Steve Keen was one of the first economists to break ranks very publicly way back in 2001 and to set out an alternative - [Debunking Economics - the naked emperor dethroned](#). This coincided [with economics students in Paris objecting to the homogeneity of syllabi](#) and reaching out to others - creating in the next 15 years [a movement which has become global](#)

This is a [good presentation on the issues](#) (from 2012) and I am now reading an excellent little Penguin book [The Econocracy - the perils of leaving economics to the experts](#) by Joe Earle, Cahal Moran and Zach Ward-Perkins (2017) from their experience of stirring things up on the Manchester University economics programme. The book's sub-title says it all!

Dani Rodrik is one of the few economists with a global reputation to support them ([Ha-Yoon Chang](#) is another) and indeed Rodrik published an important book recently reviewing the state of economics - [Economics Rules - the rights and the wrongs of the dismal science](#); (2016) which was nicely [reviewed here](#). Clicking the title gives you the full text - and it seems a very good read

The [Financial Times recently reviewed](#) several other such books - so the situation is not beyond repair but we have to be realistic. **Academic economists have invested a lifetime's reputation and energy in offering the courses they do - and neither can nor will easily offer programmes to satisfy future student demands for relevance and pluralism....** chances are that the next cohort will be more pliable...

That excerpt suggests that Steve Keen was one of the "first economists to break ranks in 2001" - in the sense of presenting a wholesale critique of the economics discipline. But Varoufakis' [Foundation of Economics - a beginner's companion](#) was published in 1997. Indeed his "Further Reading" section - **a veritable model of a bibliography** - includes critical books from the 1970s and one from the 1950s.

I know how boring economic writing is - but it is time we understood that commentators, business people and governments make the subject boring for a very good reason....It makes us apathetic and less inclined to challenge the system.....

I was once, if briefly and somewhat under false pretences, an economics lecturer - but [my financial illiteracy is almost criminal if not, sadly, unusual](#). Most of us seem to lack the patience to buckle down and take the time and discipline it needs to understand the operation of the system of financial capitalism which now has us all in its thrall. We leave it to the "experts" and have thereby surrendered what is left to us of citizenship and political power.

What makes Varoufakis' various books such excellent reading is the sheer originality of his prose - showing a mind at work which is constantly active.....looking for new perspectives.....rejecting dead phrases, clichés and jargon... using narrative and stories to carry us along.....thinking constantly about how to keep the readers' interest alive...

He's in command of the English language - rather than, as so often happens, the language being in charge of him.....TS Eliot WS Graham

You don't expect to find good prose in the "Further Reading" section of a book, but just see what Varoufakis does with the task.....

The main reason for writing this book was a lack of sources to which I could refer my students for a more wholesome diet than that offered by conventional textbooks. The problem with books and articles which treat their reader to the fascinating debates is that they are too hard for beginners; especially for today's university environment which is more demanding on first year undergraduates' time than once was the case. Thus in order to achieve maximum emphasis I will confine myself to a small number of suggestions for further reading.

The one book you must read

First, I must recommend Robert Heilbroner's bewitching introduction to the evolution of economic ideas entitled **The Wordly Philosophers** (1953). If you are to read one book beyond the standard economics textbook (and perhaps the one you are holding), attempt this one; you will not regret it.

Textbooks

The first economics textbook which set the scene for today's multi-colour glossy door-stops was written by Paul Samuelson (first published in 1948). It is entitled "**Economics**" - and is the most famous text since the Second World War and, still, the most interesting (notwithstanding my overall displeasure with economics textbooks). All the textbooks have since attempted to emulate Samuelson and, as is always the case with imitators, they succeeded only partially. Those of you with a sense of textbook history will benefit from reading Samuelson's mega-hit.

An economist's ambition

I don't care who writes a nation's laws—or crafts its advanced treatises —as long as I can write its textbooks.
Paul Samuelson

If you want something more contemporary, helpful on a day-to-day basis (especially for first year economics students) and with an appreciation of the limitations of economics and the importance of history and political debate, try the large (though not expensive) volume which was put together by the economists at the Open University. Being part of a distance-learning institution, the Open University team edited a book that students can read independently as opposed to a reference manual to be consulted after a lecture. Its title is **Economics and Changing Economies** (published by the Open University in association with Thomson Business Press in 1996). It contains chapters on everything that you are likely to encounter in your first (perhaps even your second) year as an undergraduate and each topic is treated sensitively and with a humility that is uncommon (unfortunately) amongst economics texts. If you want to improve your essay skills and dazzle your tutor with your command of particular topics, don't miss this book.

If you wish for something smaller and somewhat simpler (e.g. if you are an interested general reader rather than a student worried about particular assignments), I suggest Robert Heilbroner and Lester Thurow's **Economics Explained** (Simon and Schuster, 1994). On the other hand, if you want a 'cutting-edge' neoclassical textbook, I find Robert Frank's **Microeconomics and Behavior** (McGraw-Hill, 1993) to be the most (although still insufficiently) open-minded of the introductions to neoclassical thinking.

Unconventional textbooks

I will mention only two. For a holistic, open-minded and rather comprehensive approach to economics, I suggest Vicky Allsopp's **Understanding Economics** (Routledge, 1995). Allsopp manages to remain well within the mainstream while reorganising the various topics in such a way as to make it easier for the beginner to see economic thinking as more than technical gymnastics. For instance, she offers her readers a chapter on 'Law, custom and money' which is a far better introduction to the concept of money (not an easy one!) than the standard chapters on money demand, money supply, assets, etc. which pollute most textbooks. Additionally Allsopp offers a comprehensive chapter on 'Investment', a much neglected yet crucial topic.

The second suggestion here is one for those of you whose appetite was whetted by the glimpses of non-neoclassical economic theory in this book. If you wish to explore those ideas further, a good place to start is Malcolm Sawyer's **Introduction to Radical Economics** (Macmillan, 1989). There you will find simple introductions to the Ricardian, Marxist, Neo-Keynesian and Neo-Austrian ideas mentioned in this book's more critical chapters (primarily Chapters 6 and 7).

The road to paradise

Let's face it: economics is boring most of the time. Economists' best efforts (of course I include myself in this sad category) are unlikely to offer excitement and reading pleasure for more than a few moments. To punctuate the

boredom, I suggest that you move to the borderline between economics and the other social sciences. That is the way, if not to heaven, to less arid fields of thought.

Looking at books I enjoyed as a student, one book whose effects I have tried to emulate here is **Economics: An anti-text**, edited by Francis Green and Peter Nore (Macmillan, 1977), a book devoted to countering the brainwashing of economics textbooks.

I also recall fondly another book whose influence stays with me today: Ed Nell and Martin Hollis's **Rational Economic Man** (Cambridge University Press, 1976). I remember it was hard-going in parts but lucid and simple, as well as very exciting, in other parts. Much of my Chapters 4 and 11 have been inspired by that book.

Unfortunately time has left its mark on it and it will perhaps seem somewhat dated to a fresh pair of eyes. None the less it may still be a good idea to borrow a well-thumbed copy from a library for perusal. Since then Nell and Hollis have published other books which are more up to date. Nell's **Making Sense of a Changing Economy: Technology, markets and morals** is an interesting read (Routledge, 1996). However, again with a view to narrowing down your 'shopping list', I want to urge you to read some of Hollis' work. (If you could see and hear me I would be gesticulating very energetically in support of this recommendation!)

Although not an economist (Hollis is a philosopher), his writings pack great insight and inspiration for students of the economy. Have a look at his enticing (and easy-going) **The Philosophy of Social Science: An introduction** (Cambridge University Press, 1994).

And if you feel more adventurous and altruistic to your future self, tackle two more of his books: **Reason in Action** (1996) is a collection of articles on many philosophical issues central to economics (e.g. the free-rider problem) whereas **The Cunning of Reason** (1987) is a wonderful investigation on what it means for a social animal to be rational.

Be warned: these two books (both published by Cambridge University Press) are hard work for first year students and you are unlikely to plough through their entirety. Nevertheless even reading bits of them, and making a point of returning to them in the years to come, will fill you with joy and pride.

How Will it All End?

I have long had this naïve belief that the next non-fiction book would clear the fog of confusion which seems to hover in my mind on most subjects. I know I'm going to be disappointed but, somehow, the hope still lingers. And so the books continue to pile up on my shelves....

[Wolfgang Streeck](#) is a modest 70 year-old German sociologist currently taking the world by storm. I had bought and thoroughly enjoyed his [Buying Time - the delayed crisis of democratic capitalism](#) (2014) and am now reading his [How will Capitalism End?](#) (2016). He puts the rest of us to shame by being able to draft his material in English...(all but two chapters of the present book).

His [quiet, unassuming manner](#) belies his history as a Social Democrat party activist and one of the founders of (although latterly critic of) the [Varieties of Capitalism school](#). His global profile came only in the past decade - since his book [Re-forming Capitalism - institutional change in the German political economy](#) (2009) was published by Oxford University Press and New Left Review published in 2011 what was to be the first of a series of articles from him - [The Crises of Democratic Capitalism](#) (2011).

The bottom Line

Basically he is an example of a disillusioned social democrat - who used to believe that it was possible to reform capitalism but has, at some point in the past decade, been forced to recognize that this is no longer possible...This paper is probably the easiest [introduction to his arguments](#) - complete with some good graphs. And this is a [great summary of a discussion](#) he took part in with Etzioni

The introduction to his latest book is particularly enticing - first interrogating the five authors of [Does Capitalism have a future?](#) before suggesting that the totality of our responses to the global

challenges we face can be summarized as one or other variant of "[Coping, hoping, doping and shopping](#)"

The "endgame" he suggests will be drawn-out, disjointed and uncomfortable - although he doesn't really spend all that much space on the issue.....and the book is remarkably light on the question of AI and robotisation which has been exercising a lot of people....

The book does encourage me to go back to this issue - it was March 2018 when I uploaded a (short) version of [Dispatches to the Next Generation](#).

A Streeck Resource

<https://nomadron.blogspot.com/2014/09/some-notes-on-crisis.html>

<https://nomadron.blogspot.com/2015/03/how-governments-have-bought-and-used-up.html>

<https://nomadron.blogspot.com/2016/11/now-with-bang-but-whimper.html>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lo8TF6GZg7E>

<https://wolfgangstreeck.files.wordpress.com/2018/05/streeck-summer-2018.pdf>

https://wolfgangstreeck.files.wordpress.com/2017/11/streeck2017_whose-side-are-we-on.pdf

<http://kingsreview.co.uk/articles/farewell-neoliberalism-interview-wolfgang-streeck/>

summary and interview 2017 - <http://nearfuturesonline.org/the-life-and-time-of-the-european-consolidation-state/>

Does Capitalism have a future? with Etzioni

https://pure.mpg.de/rest/items/item_2259978/component/file_2388108/content

interview Jacobin 2016 <https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/2518-social-democracy-s-last-rounds-wolfgang-streeck-for-jacobin>

<https://thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2016/11/08/will-capitalism-end-or-can-it-be-reformed/>

2016 interview <https://journals.openedition.org/regulation/11925>

<https://www.research.manchester.ac.uk/portal/files/45379477/Ronzoni.EJPT.pdf> - the best summary and review

The Rise of the European Consolidation State (2015) https://www.mpifg.de/pu/mpifg_dp/dp15-1.pdf

politics of public debt 2013 https://www.mpifg.de/pu/mpifg_dp/dp13-7.pdf

http://www.mpifg.de/people/ws/downloads/Streeck_Small-State%20Nostalgia.pdf

<https://thecurrentmoment.wordpress.com/2012/01/03/interview-with-wolfgang-streeck/>

2011 Dem capitalism and its contradictions:

<https://www.econstor.eu/bitstream/10419/51554/1/670480223.pdf>

NLR article per se https://pure.mpg.de/rest/items/item_1231852/component/file_1827359/content

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9oYebm07WaQ>

<https://soundcloud.com/user-726964754/wolfgang-streeck-the-future-of-capitalism>

re-forming capitalism - <http://www.people.fas.harvard.edu/~phall/EJS%202009.pdf>

I have a little list

I couldn't quite pin the idea down which had been bothering me the entire week...it was something to do with the world having escaped "our" control, But it was also something to do with the mental models we used to make sense of the world....

So here is the list of books which landed up on my desk - with, inevitably, a few highly opinionated comments....

These titles, it should be emphasised, do not claim to represent anything except the vagaries of my purchases and interests. Half of them just happen to be in my library - but another nine are E-books (you can therefore all access) which reflect important stages in the very slow understanding which has overtaken us in the past half century that we have allowed a perverse linear/mechanistic model of society to occupy our minds.....

The date of the first book is 1967..... That's 50 years ago....a long time for an idea to gestate and develop....The last book arrived only a few weeks ago and didn't seem to be part of this conversation - but as I started it, I realised it was all about....mental models!

The Books which landed up on my desk

Titles from 1967	Clarity Factor	Significance	full book?
The Costs of Economic Growth ; EJ Mishan (1967)	1	The first time an economist warns of this	
The Limits to Growth ; Club of Rome (1972)	2	The book which made the warning global	
The Sane Alternative - a choice of futures ; James Robertson (1978)	1	"Small is Beautiful" (1973) was seen as partisan, if not extreme. James Robertson's book put the case in more balanced terms	Yes
The Whale and the Reactor - the search for limits in an age of high technology ; Langdon Winner (1986)	2	Amazingly prescient book -	Yes
The Fifth Discipline; the art and practice of the learning organisation ; Peter Senge (1990)	3	Made the concepts of systems and of "the learning organisation" fashionable	
The Development Dictionary - a guide to knowledge as power; ed W Sachs (1992)	2	A powerful challenge to "the western view"	yes
The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook ; Peter Senge 1994	2	The sub-title says it all - strategies and tools for building a learning organisation	
The Web of Life Fritjof Capra 1996	4	A well-intentioned presentation of systems thinking - but tough going	
Deep Change ; Robert Quinn 1996	2	Quinn's first draft of what became the superb "Change the World"	
Leadership and the new Science - discovering order in a chaotic	2	An early classic in the attempt to present a new world of complexity	

world Margaret Wheatley 1999			
Dialogue and the art of thinking together ; William Isaacs (1999)	3	One of many focusing on dialogue...	
Change the World ; Robert Quinn (2000)	1	I simply don't understand why this book is so seldom mentioned....perhaps because it makes a moral case?	
The Ingenuity Gap - how can we solve the problems of the future? Thomas Homer-Dixon (2001)	1	A fascinating book which focuses on the complexity of the contemporary world - with a powerful narrative	
Towards Holistic Governance - the new reform agenda ; Perri 6, Leat, Seltzer and Stoker (2002)	4	Cooperation in government is an important topic but is dealt with in an over-confident and technical manner by these academics	
Systems thinking - creative holism for managers ; Michael Jackson (2003)	3	Very comprehensive but - at 378 pages - not immediately user-friendly....	yes
Critical Mass ; Philip Ball (2004)	3	A popular attempt to look at systems issues which probably tries to cover too many areas	
An End to Suffering - the Buddha in the World ; Pankaj Mishra(2004)	2	A delightful idea and easy read	
Presence - exploring profound change in people, organisations and society ; P Senge et al (2005)	3	A conversation between 4 friends which reflects their uncertainties. Just a bit too self-indulgent and self-referential	
The Dictionary of Alternatives - utopianism and organisation ; ed M Parker, V Fournier and P Reedy (2007)	3	A nice idea - which I have still to read	
Thinking in Systems - a primer;Donella Meadows (2008)	2	The early pages are a delight to read - this is the woman who lead the team which produced "Limits to Growth"	Yes
Exploring the Science of Complexity ; Ben Ramalingam et al (ODI 2008)	5	Almost incoherent - but see "Aid on the edge of Chaos" below	Yes
The Master and His Emissary - the divided brain and the making of the Western World ; Iain McGilchrist (2009)	3	Apparently a very important read but, with more than 500 pages, too big a challenge for me....	
Deconstructing Development Buzzwords (2010)	3	Clever...	Yes
Power and Love; a theory and practice of social change ; Adam Kahane (2010)	2	Most authors would avoid a title like this - but Kahane's south African experience makes this a great story	
The Dance on the Feet of Chance ;	3	A bit too technical - but honest	

Hooman Attar (2010)			
Mastery ; Robert Greene (2012)	2	An important topic, nicely presented by a craftsman of his trade	
Aid on the Edge of Chaos ; Ben Ramalingam (2013)	3	A very comprehensive treatment of the various strands but ultimately (at 450 pages) indigestible	
Embracing Complexity - strategic perspectives for an age of turbulence ; J Boulton, P Allen and C Bowman (2015)	1	At first glance, wonderfully clear	
How Change Happens Duncan Green (2016)	1	With its focus on the marginalised of the world, this may not immediately attract but it's one the best discussions of change...	Yes
Can We Know Better? ; Robert Chambers (2017)	1	What could be final reflections from the development scholar who wrote " Whose Reality Counts? putting the Last First "...	Yes
Doughnut Economics - seven ways to think like a 21st century economist ; K Raworth (2017)	1	Didn't seem part of this discussion - but the clarity of her exposition of how certain ideas first came to be developed blows you away!!	

Why the Reluctance to seek consensus?

Few people realise the scale of money and civil service time spent on international jamborees which focus on [millennium goals](#), [migration](#) and debt [relief](#) - let alone [global warming](#). It amounts to tens of billions of dollars and thousand of man-years.

In stark contrast, little energy seems to be spent attempting to get consensus on the way forward for the deficiencies which have been so visible over the past decade in the economic system which we know, variously, as "globalization" or, increasingly, as "capitalism".

- The UN had its fingers burned when, in 2009, it organized the [first and only Conference on the World Financial and Economic Crisis](#). The G77 group of 130 developing countries tried to insert text that mandated a major role for the UN in dealing with the crisis and backed a comprehensive set of reforms, but northern countries including the US and the EU played a blocking game. [Joseph Stiglitz was the author](#) of what remained a Preliminary Report (which I [wrote about in 2011](#))
- the OECD remains a fan club for unrestricted growth although it does occasionally allow agnostics to produce reports - see, for example, Stiglitz's latest opus [Beyond GDP Measuring what counts](#)
- The World Bank's latest [World Development Report](#) is as [neo-liberal a document](#) as you could imagine

So it has been left to [The Club of Rome](#) to come up (a few weeks ago) with [Come On! Capitalism, short-termism, population and the destruction of the planet](#); (Club of Rome 2018) - which is superbly [summarized in this article](#) in the current issue of the fascinating [Cadmus journal](#). There's also a [video of a recent introductory presentation](#) at Chatham House.

So the question I want to pose today is why there are so few such attempts to seek consensus on the dominant question of our age - whether at a national or international level; governmental or non-governmental??

I confess I didn't pay much attention to Yannis Varoufakis' recent [Democracy in Europe](#) initiative (however fascinating his writing, the man is [a bit too domineering](#) for my liking) - but I now see that it is a rare and impressive attempt to bring people together to challenge at least one of the dominant players in the economic/financial system. A [short 3 page version of its manifesto is here](#)

Few others, it seems, dare venture down such a path - presumably because they are scared of ridicule or of failure?

I would like to seek readers' help in identifying other initiatives - however minor.

I am aware of [The Great Transition Initiative](#) which encourages individuals to comment on a monthly question and paper. Of course it can be criticized for catering only for nerds - but at least it is reaching out to form a network...

[The Next System](#) is also a good source of well-written material - project of the US [Democracy Collaborative](#). It had an initial report - [The Next System Report - political possibilities for the 21st Century](#) (2015) and references to good community practice in various parts of the world. It has since followed up [with a series of worthwhile papers](#).

Further Reading

[A New Cooperative Economy](#); Guy Dauncey (2017)

[DiE25 Manifesto](#) (2015)

[2017 British Labour Party Manifesto](#)

[The First Global Revolution](#) (Club of Rome 1990)

<http://www.feasta.org/>

<https://www.tni.org/en/public-alternatives>

<http://www.world-psi.org/en/issue/privatisation>

[Journey to Earthland](#)

[The Triumph of the Political Class](#) was interesting because, rightly or wrongly, it seemed to identify a turning point - that the way the British system of government operated had changed significantly (and for the worse) in the 1980s.....He was not the only person arguing this - a year before, Simon Jenkins' [Thatcher and Sons](#); (2006) had conducted the same analysis but without using such dramatic terms as "new political class" and "manipulative populism"..

And even political scientists had been remarking that the much-famed "Westminster model" (of dominant political power) seemed to have been replaced with a much more consensual one of networked "governance". Rod Rhodes - whom I briefly met in the 1970s - had been the foremost proponent of this view with his concept of "[hollowed out government](#)"

My table included a 2006 textbook [British Politics - a critical introduction](#) by Stuart McAnulla which nicely captures the sort of debate going on in those days in these academic circles.....with McAnulla taking issue with both the traditional and reformist schools of thought and suggesting **that we needed to extend our understanding of power beyond the political.....**

It is, of course, nothing less than astounding that it took a global financial crisis to force academia to consider that government agendas are shaped by more than political manoeuvrings - and McAnulla's is still a fairly lonely voice in his profession....The commercial links of New Labour were memorably exposed by George Monbiot in his 2001 expose [The Captive State - the corporate takeover of Britain](#) But, astonishingly, only 2 of the 500 pages of [The UK's Changing Democracy - the 2018 Democratic Audit](#) have anything to say about corruption

Wolin's [Democracy Inc](#) (2008) questioned the scale of commercial funding of American political personalities was distinctive only for it being produced by an academic (one of the most respected) and came out ten years ago.

Neither it - nor the various studies of the significance of [lobbying activity and resources at the European level](#) - seem to make any impact on our discussions about democracy....Here is a rare [2014 academic contribution to the question of how consistent capitalism now is with democracy](#)

We seem indeed averse to talking about "power" and its various facets...although most of us tend to have our own little conspiracy theory....I grant you that books on the subject tend to be rather specialised and daunting.....although Robert Greene's [48 Laws of Power](#) is a very good read.....if focusing rather too much on individual rather than systemic or structural factors. When we look for books about power, we invariably find that they are written by sociologists who are not famed for their clarity- one honourable exception being the recent [Vampire Capitalism](#) (2017).

Probably the best book about the subject is Steven Lukes' slim [Power - a radical view](#) (2005) which starts with the simple story of how the post-war argument about the structure of power basically got underway with an American (Dahl) being upset with how 2 colleagues (C Wright Mills and Floyd Hunter) were portraying a power elite that seemed impervious to accountability - at both national and local levels...

Inevitably, however, even this book is guilty of the dreaded compartmentalisation of which academia is so guilty - and fails to mention the classic work of [Amitai Etzioni who in the 1960s](#)

differentiated organisations according to "coercion, economic assets and normative values". Sticks, carrots and moral persuasion we would call it.....And if you're wondering what "moral persuasion" is when it's at home, [Joseph Nye's "soft power"](#) will tell you more than Antonio Gramsci's "[hegemonic power](#)"!!

- let alone the policy analysis writing of [Charles Lindblom](#) who broke with his friend Dahl when he wrote "Politics and Markets" but whose [The Market System](#) (2003) still showed a reluctance to challenge commercial power

Time to Reclaim Public Services

To coincide with this year's Davos Conference, Oxfam has just released what has become an annual shot over the bows of the global plutocrats, who assemble in that Swiss resort at this time of the year. And this year's publication focuses onpublic services....**just in time to serve as a nice intro to this post. So read [Public Good or Private Wealth?](#) (Oxfam 2019)** with the rest of this post. I realise I've been muttering all these months about the importance of public services - but have been very frugal on references.

The most valuable source for me on privatization was the [Public Services International Research Unit](#) at the University of Greenwich which, very sadly, now appears to be closed? Their last publications seems to be this report on benefits, costs and processes of [Public ownership of the UK Energy System](#) - in 2016

The other important briefing source has been [the Transnational Institute](#) which, in 2017, produced a superb 250 page report [Reclaiming Public Services](#) - analyzing the way that 1500 cities throughout the world have managed to get rid of the privatized bodies which had made a mess of things. In 2009 the same body had helped publish Hilary Wainwright's [Public Sector Reform - but not as we know it](#) - which remains one of the very few clearly-written documents on the subject (see "recommended reading" below)

Unusually, the United Nations has now added its voice to **the critique of privatization** with a major report recently which [details the appalling effects on poorer countries of the privatisation model](#) which the World Bank and IMF continue to peddle. The report is 25 pages long and the [English version can be read here](#).

Last summer I offered a crisp [summary of my thinking about administrative reform](#) - a summary which has, I think, withstood the test of time....

- In 1989 "the state" crumbled - at least in eastern europe... 30 years on. how do we assess the "huge efforts" to make its operations more "effective"??
- 15 question offer a key to the most interesting writing on the matter.
- Different parts of the world have their own very different approaches and ways of talking about reform. English language material has tended to dominate the literature; but
- Scandinavians, Germans and French let alone South Americans, Chinese and Indians have also developed important ideas and experience - of which English-speakers tend to be blithely unaware.

- Two very different "world views" have held us in thrall over the past 50 years....a "third" and more balanced (eg the "new public service") has been trying to emerge
- We seem to be overwhelmed by texts on reform experience - but most written by academics. Where are the journalists who can help the public make sense of it all ?
- At least 8 very different groups have been active in shaping our thinking about "reform" efforts
- These are - academics, journalists, politicians, think-tankers, global bodies, senior officials, consultants and an indeterminate group
- each uses very different language and ideas - with academics being the most prolific (but tending to talk in jargon amongst themselves; and therefore being ignored by the rest of us)
- Some old hands have tried to summarise the experience for us in short and clear terms. The lesson, they suggest, is that little has changed...
- What is sad is how few "social justice" campaigners seem interesting in this issue. Hilary Wainwright being an honourable exception.....

Of course, the "huge efforts" were external (mainly EC) and financial - the "local elites" have had their own "exploitative" agendas and lack a single gram of altruism in their bodies...

Good Reads

Readable generalist books - the last 25 years have seen astonishingly few such books (in the English language)

[Dismembered - the ideological attack on the state](#); Polly Toynbee and D Walker_(2017) a clear analysis by two british journalists

[How to Run a Government so that Citizens Benefit and Taxpayers don't go Crazy](#) ; Michael Barber (2015). A clearly written toolkit by Tony Blair's favourite consultant

[The Fourth Revolution - the global race to reinvent the state](#); J Micklewaithe and A Woolridge (2015) Editors of no less a journal than The Economist give us a breathless neoliberal analysis

[The Tragedy of the Private - the potential of the public](#); Hilary Wainwright (PSI 2014) an important little pamphlet

[Public Sector Reform - but not as we know it](#); Hilary Wainwright (Unison and TNI 2009) A rare readable case study of a bottom-up approach to reform

[Democracy Inc - managed democracy and the specter of inverted totalitarianism](#); SS Wolin (2008) the doyen of American political science takes the American political system apart!

[The Essential Public Manager](#); Chris Pollitt (2003) A critical analysis of the political and technical aspects of the search for effective public services

[The Captive State](#) - the corporate takeover of Britain; George Monbiot (2000) A powerful critique of the nature and scale of corporate involvement in our public services

[Change the World](#); Robert Quinn (2000) Simply the best analysis of the process of social and organizational change

[Reinventing Government](#); David Osborne and Graeber (1992) The book which started the New Public Management revolution_

More specialist recommended reads

[Supporting small steps - a rough guide for developmental professionals](#) (Manning; OECD 2015)

[A Governance Practitioner's Notebook - alternative ideas and approaches](#) (Whaites et al OECD 2015)

[Rethinking policy and politics - reflections on contemporary debates in policy studies](#) ed C Ayres (2014)

[Reinventing Organisations](#); Frederic Laloux (2014)

[People, Politics and Change - building communications strategy for governance reform](#) (World Bank 2011)

[Governance Reform under Real-World Conditions - citizens, stakeholders and Voice](#) (World Bank 2008)

[The International Trade Union Confederation](#)

[European Trade Unions](#) (ETUC)

[Public Services International](#)

[TUC \(Trade Union Council\) UK](#)

when you question their relevance in this part of the world; the "ideological baggage" of those parachuted in; and the "vested interests" which they encounter....What, however, keeps me writing about the issue is that the first 2 of these 3 arguments are also relevant in the rest of Europe..... Yesterday's post identified 4 important reasons why I consider the subject a crucial one to keep blogging about....

The state absorbs so much of our money and the time of senior officials and politicians.....who are allowed to get away with utter lies and fantasies when challenged about performance and its future shape....

<https://www.shortlist.com/news/20-best-dystopian-novels/43969>

coming in at almost 1400 pages. [This Google book excerpt](#) covers most of the first 100 odd pages...including, for the first time, linguistic issues...and the link on the title gives the annexes on the different continental admin traditions (40 pages) with someone from one continent reflecting on another's tradition. Chapter [Two can also be found here](#)

[gov](#)

<https://mro.massey.ac.nz/bitstream/handle/10179/9442/Meaning%20just%20what%20i%20choose.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

Last June [How did admin reform get so sexy? summer 2018](#)

https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/e475c8_500664a1674e438c88426d3b953d35b4.pdf

January 18 version

https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/e475c8_ec5e00623301488f803025f1c4ec3ae0.pdf

https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/e475c8_d23e806178ef4872b7933ee255c7ab82.pdf

Inconclusion - Will this too pass?

The table at the very start of the book identifies the various "debates" which gripped English-speaking countries at least, decade by decade, from the 1930s...through to the present.

It's impressionistic - so doesn't try to bring google analytics to aid - and people may quibble with some of the references. But many who look at it will perhaps feel a shiver down their spine as they recognise how transitory many of our discussions have been.

And issues don't necessarily go away - some are simply repackaged



It may cover an 80 year period but all the themes still echo in my mind since it was 1960 when I embarked on my political economy education at Glasgow University - and the key books of the 40s were still influential. Indeed the writings which had the biggest impact on me were Europeans from the start of the century - such as Max Weber, Emile Durkheim, Robert Michels and Karl Popper. Outside the university, it was the writings of RHTawney and Tony Crosland which shaped me - and had me joining the Labour Party in 1959; becoming first an activist; then a councillor; and someone who quickly developed a rather contradictory mix of corporate management and community power principles.

I didn't know it at the time but I was at the start of an ideological upheaval of tectonic proportions as the Keynesian certainties began to crumble in the face of the Hayekian onslaught. For some reason, however, I chose to focus on regional development although the ideas of the strangely named "[public choice](#)" theorists did get to me in the early 1970s - through the pamphlets of the [Institute of Economic Affairs](#). But it was the social engineering approach of the managerialists which eventually won the battle for my soul. I vividly remember sitting in front of the radio enthralled as [Donald Schon](#) delivered the Reith lectures in autumn 1970 under the title "Beyond the Stable State". During it he coined the phrase "dynamic conservatism" - a phenomenon which I was to study for several decades in different countries.

I read the literature on organisational change avidly - and tried to apply it wherever I went...John Stewart of the University of Birmingham's Institute of Local Government Studies was a particular inspiration....

Policy Analysis - then in its early days - was an obvious attraction and I enrolled on the UK's first (postgraduate) course on the subject at the University of Strathclyde, run by

Lewis Gunn - which disappointed for its over-rationalistic approach - although it was there that I first came across the notion of "[framing theory](#)". I confess, however, that when I actually had in 2002 to draft a primer on policy analysis for some civil servants in Slovakia, it was the rationalistic approach I adopted rather than that contained in the [Policy Paradox](#) book by [Deborah Stone](#) which I only encountered later.

What, however, the "This too will pass" table doesn't record is the amazing change that occurred in HOW we talked about these various "issues"...in short the "discursive" or "narrative turn" which post-modernist thought has given us.

Although I've grown to appreciate the rich plurality of interpretations the postmodernists can present on any issue, I'm not quite ready to join their carefree, fatalistic band...

"Whatever....." does not strike me as the most helpful response to give to those anguished by the cutthroat actions of those in privileged positions....

The point I have reached is

- It seems impossible to get a social or moral consensus in our societies for [the sort of rebalancing which Henry Mintzberg](#) has brilliantly argued for
- the voices are too diverse these days - as [explained by Mike Hulme](#)
- people have grown tired and cynical
- those in work have little time or energy to help them identify relevant actions
- those out of work are too depressed
- although the retired generally have the time, resources and experience to be doing more than they are
- but they have lost trust in the capability or good intentions of governments
- let alone the promises of politicians
- and are confronted with too many disparate voices in the reform movement
- Most of the "apocalypticists" (such as [William Greer](#) and [Dmitry Orlov](#)) who have confronted the collapse of industrial civilisation counsel a Candide like "garden cultivation"
- And yet I still persevere in my naïve belief that governments are capable of doing more.....
- Am I wrong?

It's perhaps appropriate that, at this point I reach for TS Eliot -

*..... And what there is to conquer
By strength and submission, has already been discovered
Once or twice, or several times, by men whom one cannot hope
To emulate - but there is no competition -
There is only the fight to recover what has been lost
And found and lost again and again; and now under conditions
That seem unpropitious. But perhaps neither gain nor loss
For us, there is only the trying. The rest is not our business.*

(The Four Quartets)

Although half of this little book has focused on the writing about the global economic crisis of the past decade, the book for which it is a taster is probably more concerned with the moral and political aspects. And that book is still being written - although it can be seen in its present draft form at [Dispatches to the \(post-capitalist?\) future generation](#). That book contains many more posts (with to my daughters and their generation very much been in my mind) as I try to complete what is effectively a "giving of account" -with all the religious overtones that term carries!. It is twice as long as this little book - a lot of it analysing my progressive disillusionment with the political process and system. An important book - [Defending Politics](#) - reminded me that we are in danger of overdoing the scapegoating of politicians

But one thing I have never really properly shared is my feeling that, as each fashionable doctrine ebbs away and is replaced with a new fashion, we generally fail to ask why we had such inflated expectations. We are always too keen to move onto the next bandwagon that comes along.....

Hence the table which starts (and completes) this book. It's not meant to be fatalistic but is there to remind us that, in our breathless fascination with the new, forces tend to be cyclical and that we can and should try to learn a bit from history.

I know that Tolstoy encouraged us to live in the present but....everything in proportion.....

And that fault of ours reminds me of the other fault of so many books about the crisis to which I've drawn attention several times - namely their over-focus on explanation and paucity of prescriptions. Just as we are missing good annotated bibliographies and typologies - so we lack serious analyses of the brief prescriptions with which most such books end....

My own Annexes include a little section on some of the great books of the past century and also a favourite of mine - "Just Words - a Sceptic's Glossary"

Ronald Young
22 April 2019
Bucharest



ANNEX 1 Key Reading

We increasingly suffer, it seems to me, from amnesia - the relentless search for "the new" does not encourage references to older books which tend therefore to be neglected by younger generations.

This is a list drawn up by a white male who had a Scottish university education (in politics and economics) in the early 1960s and is limited therefore by that interest in political economy - rather than, for example, psychology.... (although I have included the injunctions of Dale Carnegie and Benjamin Spock as well as the more thoughtful analyses of Carl Rodgers)

But "Mein Kampf" and the writings of Ayn Rand are excluded - despite the influence they had..... I simply can't view them as serious.....

My key Books of the 20th Century - Part I

As a starter, let me offer this list of 35 books - taking us to 1973.

Political Parties - Robert Michels (1913). One of the key texts during my course on Political Sociology in 1963 and one I often refer to. Focused on the German SDP and trade unions to demonstrate how even democratically-elected leaders fall prey to "the iron law of oligarchy"

Public Opinion - Walter Lippmann (1921) Continued the critique of actual democracy from where Michels left off. He looked at how public perceptions are formed and argues that politicians are incapable of accurately understanding issues and proposes that a professional, "specialized class" collect and analyze data, and present their conclusions to the society's decision makers, who, in their turn, use the "art of persuasion" to inform the public about the decisions and circumstances affecting them.

"Public Opinion" proposes that the increased power of propaganda, and the specialized knowledge required for effective political decisions, have rendered impossible the traditional notion of democracy. Moreover, Public Opinion introduced the phrase "the manufacture of consent", which Chomsky used for Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media (1988)

Revolt of the Masses - Jose Ortega y Gasset (1930) critical of the masses, contrasting "noble life and common life" and excoriating the barbarism and primitivism he sees in the mass-man.

Moral Man and Immoral Society - Reinhold Niebuhr (1932) - one of the books which made the biggest impact on me at University.

The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money - JM Keynes (1936). It was the core of my economics education although, like most people, it was the summaries I read rather than the original.....

[How to make friends and influence people](#) - Dale Carnegie (1936) I read it for the first time recently and had to confess to finding it useful....

The Managerial Revolution - [James Burnham](#) (1941) A book which helped move the left to the notion of a reformed capitalism in which private ownership was tamed by a new managerial class.

[Escape from Freedom](#) - Erich Fromm (1941) Another book which was still influential in the early 1960s....

[Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy](#) - Joseph Schumpeter (1942). "Elite theory" was one of the most important parts of my politics course - taking in not only Michels but Italians Mosca and Pareto. One of the most scintillating books was Schumpeter's - particularly for his theory about the "circulation of elites"....

[The Open Society and its Enemies](#) - Karl Popper (1944) The book which made the biggest impact on me and to which I owe my scepticism....A lot of it (particularly the sections on Platp, Hegel and Marx) went over my head - but its assertion of the importance of scientific "disproving" has stayed with me my entire life....

[The Road to Serfdom](#) - Friedrich Hayek (1944) One of only a handful of key books which I have never read

Baby and Child Care - [Benjamin Spock](#) (1946) The bible in the post-war period for parents

[Sexual Behaviour in the Human Male](#) - Kinsey (1948)

[The Second Sex](#) - Simone de Beauvoir (1949). The book that set the 68 generation on fire!

[The Lonely Crowd](#) - David Riesmann (1950) Introduced us all to bureaucratic anomie

[The Power Elite](#) - C Wright Mills (1956) Another major influence - he wrote beautifully....

[The Future of Socialism](#) - CAR Crosland (1956) Fifteen years after Burnham's book, Crosland enshrined its central message in the key revisionist text for the left...

[The Hidden Persuaders](#) - Vance Packard (1957) The first real critique of advertising for my generation

[The Affluent Society](#) - JK Galbraith (1958) The book which coined the phrase "private affluence and public squalor" (as well as "the conventional wisdom").....Galbraith was the master of dry wit and caustic humour - and a superb analyst

[The End of Ideology](#) - Daniel Bell (1960). [Daniel Bell](#) was one of the sociology "greats" and first formulated the ide of post-industrial society, See his 1976 book

[The Death and Life of American Cities](#) Jane Jacobs (1961). The woman whoreminded the world that cities were for human beings

[On Becoming a Person](#) - [Carl Rogers](#) (1961) The figure who most clearly expressed the mood and feelings of my generation....

The Fire Next Time - [James Baldwin](#) (1962). One of the early classics of "black activism"

[Silent Spring](#) - Rachel Carson (1962) The first environmental book!

[In Defence of Politics](#) - Bernard Crick (1962) Along with Popper, the book which changed my life!

[Capitalism and Freedom](#) - Milton Friedmann (1962). I confess I've never read it!

[The Feminine Mystique](#) - Betty Friedan (1963) Interesting that it took almost 15 years for de Beauvoir's message to find wide expression....

[Unsafe at any speed](#) - Ralph Nadar (1965) The book which created consumer awareness...

[Modern Capitalism - the changing balance of public and private power](#) - Andrew Shonfield (1966) A more technical successor to Anthony Crosland's "The Future of Socialism" which introduced us all to European systems.

[The New Industrial State](#) - JK Galbraith (1967) The only author to get 2 books in the list reflects both the importance of the subjects he dealt with - and the accessible and wryly humorous style of his writing

[The Costs of Economic Growth](#) - EJ Mishan 1967. A book so in advance of its age.....

[The Active Society](#) - Amitai Etzioni (1968) A book whose importance I was aware of without having the tenacity to read.....

[Deschooling Society](#) - Ivan Illich (1970) One of several Illich books which gave me my scepticism about organisational power...

[Future Shock](#) - Alvin Toffler (1970) The first of the books which alerted us to the scale of the change underway in our societies.

[Beyond the Stable State](#) - [Donald Schoen](#) (1971) Clearly quite a few books made a major impact on me as I was emerging from teenage and in my 20s. None, however, more than this one whose core arguments I vividly remembering listening to on the family radio as Reith Lectures in 1970..... This when I became seriously interested in organisations.....

The [Limits to Growth](#) - Club of Rome (1972) The inspiration for environmentalists

[Small is Beautiful](#) - Ernst Schumacher (1973) The inspiration for the greens

Somehow I think it's going to be difficult to find an equivalent number for the 40 years which followed!!

Seminal Books of the 20th Century - part II

Apparently I'm not alone in my interest in making a list of "the key books of the century"....
"[The hundred most influential books since the war](#)" appeared last month in the Time Literary Supplement and gave us 20 titles from the 1940s....

It draws our attention to an interesting initiative of 1986 when a diverse group of writers and scholars came together to try to assist independent East European writers and publishers both at home and in exile. The Chairman was Lord Dahrendorf, Warden of St Antony's College, Oxford (and prominent German politician!).

Other members were the French historian Francois Furet; Raymond Georis, Director of the European Cultural Foundation, Amsterdam; Laurens van Krevelen of the Dutch publishing house Meulenhoff; the Swedish writer Per Waestberg, at the time President of International PEN; the European correspondent of the New Yorker, Jane Kramer; and the historian and commentator, Timothy Garton Ash.

The result, in 1995, was a book "[Freedom for Publishing, Publishing for Freedom](#)" which listed 100 key books, listed sequentially on the TLS blog.

I have resisted the temptation to peek at the books the TLS blog gives for each of the following decades - until I have completed my own effort - and simply [pass on this list of 20 key books for the 1950s](#). A few years ago, Time Magazine gave us an interesting annotated [list of the 100 best nonfiction books](#)

I am having much more difficulty identifying "seminal books with a distinctive voice" for the last 40 years. I had little difficulty naming almost 40 books for the earlier 40-year period - mainly because they marked me at an impressionable age.

That's perhaps one of three reasons for this deficiency - ie that,

- after the age of 30, one is less easily impressed. Certainly there are more books on this list which I haven't actually read - but whose importance warrants their mention....

The other two reasons for the shorter list are that

- the battle-lines on most disputes were drawn in the first part of the century - and we are now operating in the tracks made by more famous (and original) men and women.....
- University growth, social science specialisation and bureaucratisation have killed off creativity....

Clearly such assertions need to be justified and I hope to post on this shortly....

For the moment, let me simply list the books which came to mind as I tried to complete the list.....the Peters book is there not for its quality but simply because it reflected the "mood of the time".

And, so far, I don't feel able to include a book covering the post 2001 anxieties about migration - although Chris Cauldwell's 2009 [Reflections on the Revolution in Europe](#) is a front-runner. Nor have I tried to touch the issues related to information and security.....

So my tentative list for the post 1973 years includes -

[The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism](#) - Daniel Bell (1976)

[Orientalism](#) - Edward Said (1978)

[The Breakdown of Nations](#) - Leopold Kohr (1978) A personal favourite....

[The Culture of Narcissism](#) - Christopher Lasch (1979)

[In Search of Excellence](#) - Tom Peters and Robert Waterman (1982)

[Imagined Communities](#) - Benedict Anderson (1983)

[Casino Capitalism](#) - Susan Strange (1986) Another personal favourite

[Manufacturing Consent](#) - Noam Chomsky (1988)

[The End of History](#) - Francis Fukuyama (1989). Has anyone really read it?

[Reinventing Government](#) - David Osborne and Ted Gaebler (1992) All too easy to read - inspiration for Al Gore's "reinvention" campaign and for NPM

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

[Short Circuit](#) - strengthening local economies in an unstable world - Ronald Douthwaite (1996). The book I would vote as the MUST READ for all of us these days

[The Lugano Report](#): On Preserving Capitalism in the Twenty-first Century - Susan George (1999)

[Change the World](#) - Robert Quinn (2000) A vastly underrated book

[A Brief History of Neo-Liberalism](#) - David Harvey (2005)

[Injustice - why social inequality persists](#) - David Dorling (2011)

Then there are tens of thousands of volumes which management writers have given us - of which the better have been produced by people such as Henry Mintzberg, [Charles Handy](#) and Ronnie Lessem

Just Words? How language gets in the way

Ronald G Young MA MSc

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1. Purpose
2. Searching for the heart of the onion
3. New words and phrases can cause amnesia!
4. Critiquing the professionals.....

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PREFACE

Whenever I've been given the chance, I have tried to insert a short glossary of the key words I've used in any official report - and I've become quite daring and provocative in my mockery of the "weasel words" which officials, academics and so-called experts have become so fond of using.

We should be on our alert whenever we spot a new phrase entering government discourse. New words and phrases put a particular spin on an issue and often carry the hidden implication that a new problem has just arisen.

At first I was amused at the way, for example, the vocabulary for "poverty" changed over time - inequality, disadvantage, deprivation, social malaise, marginalisation, social exclusion, social injustice etc.

Jules Feiffer had a nice cartoon about this in which he has a poor kid repeat the various words which had been used to describe his condition and then says ruefully, "at least my vocabulary is improving"!

But I now realise that three powerful forces propel such verbal gymnastics -

- first the need of governments to avoid admission of failure - better to imply a new condition had arisen! But the new vocabulary kills institutional memory and prevents us from exploring why previous solutions have failed
- Professional interests tend also to arise around each new definition - and create a second, powerful interest favouring new vocabulary. Mystification is one of several methods used by professionals to protect their power and income.
- And the last decade or so has seen a third reason for us to pay more attention to the language we use - governments have fallen even further into the hands of spin doctors and corporate interests and a powerful new verbal smokescreen has arisen to try to conceal this. "Evidence-based policy-making" is a typical phrase - first the arrogant implication that no policy-making until that point had been based on evidence; and the invented phrase concealing the fact that policy is increasingly being crafted without evidence in order to meet corporate interests! "There is no better lie than a big one!"

"Just Words" is a deliberately ambiguous title - the "just" could mean "only" or "merely" but the other meaning touches on our notions of fairness and "justice". This little glossary is offered in the spirit of the original dictionaries - which challenged our notions of just behaviour.

1. Purpose

*So here I am, in the middle way, having had twenty years -
....Trying to use words, and every attempt
is a new start, a and a different kind of failure
Because one has only learnt to get the better of words
for the thing one no longer has to say, or the way in which
one is no longer disposed to say it. And so each venture
is a new beginning, a raid on the inarticulate
with shabby equipment always deteriorating
in the general mass of imprecision of feeling*

East Coker; Four Quartets

TS Eliot

History is assumed to consist of hard events like wars and revolts. But such events don't just happen – they are caused by what goes on inside our minds – not just feelings of ambition; fear; greed; resentment; but the stories (theories) we use to make sense of events. And they are legitimised by the words we use.

Words are very powerful – indeed have a life of their own – some more so than others. Once we stop thinking about the words we use, what exactly they mean and whether they fit our purpose, the words and metaphors (and the interests behind them) take over and reduce our powers of critical thinking. One of the best essays on this topic is George Orwell's "Politics and the English language" http://mla.stanford.edu/Politics_and_English_language.pdf Written in 1947, it exposes the way certain clichés and rhetoric are calculated to kill thinking – for example how the use of the passive tense undermines the notion that it is people who take decisions and should be held accountable for them.

Fifty years before Orwell, Ambrose Bierce was another (American) journalist whose pithy and tough definitions of everyday words, in his newspaper column, attracted sufficient attention to justify a book "[The Devil's Dictionary](#)" whose fame continues unto this day. A dentist, for example, he defined as "a magician who puts metal into your mouth and pulls coins out of your pocket". A robust scepticism about both business and politics infused his work – but it did not amount to a coherent statement about power.

This glossary looks at more than 100 words and phrases used by officials, politicians, consultants and academics in the course of government reform which have this effect and offers some definitions which at least will get us thinking more critically about our vocabulary – if not actually taking political actions.

Only in the latter stages of its drafting was I reminded of John Saul's [A Doubter's Companion – a dictionary of aggressive common sense](#) issued in 1994 which talks of the "humanist tradition of using alphabetical order as a tool of social analysis and the dictionary as a quest for understanding, a weapon against idée reçues and the pretensions of power". There is a [good interview here with him](#)

Saul contrasts this approach with that "of the rationalists to the dictionary for whom it is a repository of truths and a tool to control communications".

I suppose, therefore, that this glossary of mine is written in the humanist tradition of struggle against power – and the words they use to sustain it. The glossary therefore forms part of a wider commentary on the effort various writers have made over the ages to challenge the pretensions of the powerful (and of the „thought police“ who have operated on their behalf). And, of course, the role of satire¹, caricature and cartoons², poetry³ and painting⁴ should not be forgotten! Nor the role of films and TV series these days⁵.

2. Searching for the heart of the onion

I have been heavily involved in reform efforts (and words) now for almost 50 years. I was part of that post-war generation which first succumbed to the blandishments of social sciences⁶ as my university subjects in 1962. Between 1968 and 1991 I was first a local councillor then powerful regional politician in Scotland; and the last 20 years I have spent advising government units in 8 central European and central Asian countries.

The social sciences were just beginning to flex their muscles in my student days and popular management texts also beginning to appear (we forget that Peter Drucker invented the genre only in the late 1950s). Books such as Marris and Rein's *Dilemmas of Social Reform* (1968); Donald Schoen's *Beyond the Stable State* (1971); and Heclo and Wildavsky's *The Private Government of Public Money* (1974) impressed me enormously – not only for their application of social science to topics such as the fight against poverty; organisational structures and budgeting (respectively) but also for the clarity of their language. And the combination, between 1968 and 1985 of academic and political work gave me both the incentive and opportunity to explore what light that burgeoning academic literature could throw on the scope for government actions (and structures) for social improvement. Not least of my puzzlements was about the source and nature of power. And the story told by one of the architects of the British NHS (Aneurin Bevan) about his own search for power – from his own municipality through trade unions to the heights of the British Cabinet – used the powerful metaphor of the onion. As each layer peels away, another appears – there is no heart!

I always knew that the best way to understand a subject was to write about it. And therefore developed the habit of writing papers to help me as much as others make sense of the various path-breaking initiatives in which I was involved – particularly trying to make government more “inclusive” both in its style and policy impact. The audience for such writing was practitioners – rather than academics – and also, with my first little book *The Search for Democracy* (1976), community activists who needed some help in confronting the more sophisticated bureaucracy (and words) with which they were confronted after a major reorganisation. So the language had to be clear – but not

¹ not just the literary sort – see section 9

² from Daumier to Feiffer and Steadman

³ Brecht

⁴ Goya, Kollwitz and Grosz are the most powerful example

⁵ From the “Yes, Minister” series in the UK in the 1970s to “The Thick of it” of the 2000s

⁶ inspired by the writings of such varied figures as Tony Crosland, [RH Tawney](#), EP Thompson (eg *Out of Apathy*) and Bernard Crick (his *In Defence of Politics* (1962))

superficial. This explains any idiosyncrasies in the voice I have developed. And writing that first book made me aware how few books seemed to be written to help the average person understand a subject or question. When I looked again at the books I knew, I realised most were written for one of the following reasons-

- help people pass examinations (requiring compressing of knowledge into artificial disciplines);
- make a reputation or money (requiring minimising or discrediting of other writers)
- advance a new tendentious theory

The Readers and Writers Cooperative which started in the early 1970s (now the highly successful "For Beginners" series) was the first to use a more user-friendly approach to issues. And how helpful the Dummies' Guide series are! Even Rough Guides has muscled in on this approach.

This particular effort started, I suppose, way back in 1999 when I selected about 40 words for a glossary which accompanied a little book I wrote then (*In Transit - notes on good governance*) which tried to capture my understanding of what was then the fast-moving field of public administration - for a younger generation of central europeans. My definitions were jazzed up in order to provoke thought - eg performance measurement; "*judging an organisation by measuring what it produces, rather than whom it keeps happy or employed. Most usefully done on a comparative basis - over time: or among units performing similar work*".

In 2008, the glossary I left behind in a major report - [Learning from experience; some reflections on how training can help develop administrative capacity](#) - was more outrageous.

I should emphasise that this is not a Cynic's Dictionary - although I readily confess to the occasional lapse into self-indulgent delight in shocking. But the topic of politics, power and government reform is too important for cynicism. It does, however, require a strong dose of scepticism - as evident in this [useful deconstruction of development buzzwords](#)

3. New words and phrases can cause amnesia!

We should be on our alert whenever we spot a new phrase entering government discourse. New words and phrases put a particular spin on an issue and often carry the hidden implication that a new problem has just arisen.. At first I was amused at the way, for example, the vocabulary for "poverty" changed over time - inequality, disadvantage, deprivation, social malaise, marginalisation, social exclusion, social injustice etc. Jules Feiffer had a nice cartoon about it in which he has a poor kid repeat the various words which had been used to describe his condition and then said ruefully, "at least my vocabulary is improving"!

But I now realise that three powerful forces propelled these verbal gymnastics - first the need of governments to avoid admission of failure - better to imply a new condition had arisen! But the new vocabulary kills institutional memory and prevents us from exploring why previous solutions have failed

Professional interests tend also to arise around each new definition - and create a second, powerful interest favouring new vocabulary. Mystification is one of several methods used by professionals to protect their power and income.

And the last decade or so has seen a third reason for us to pay more attention to the language we use - governments have fallen even further into the hands of spin doctors and corporate interests⁷ and a powerful new verbal smokescreen has arisen to try to conceal this. "Evidence-based policy-making" is typical - first the arrogant implication that no policy-making until that point had been based on evidence; and the invented phrase concealing the fact that policy is increasingly being crafted without evidence in order to meet corporate interests! "There is no better lie than a big one!"

4. Critiquing the professionals.....

The ideas of economists and political philosophers, both when they are right and when they are wrong, are more powerful than is commonly understood. Indeed the world is ruled by little else. Practical men, who believe themselves to be quite exempt from any intellectual influence, are usually the slaves of some defunct economist. Madmen in authority, who hear voices in the air, are distilling their frenzy from some academic scribbler of a few years back. I am sure that the power of vested interests is vastly exaggerated compared with the gradual encroachment of ideas.

[JM Keynes](#) (General Theory 1935)

In the 1970s, a South American priest Ivan Illich attacked professionals and to the mystification of their processes and language - with his various books which eloquently argued against the damage done to learning by formal schooling methods (*Deschooling Society*); and to health by doctors and hospitals (*Medical Nemesis*).

Stanislaw Andreski was one of the few academics who dared attack the pretensions of the social sciences - in his *Social Sciences as Sorcery* (1973 - now out of print).

The importance of demystifying complex language was continued by C Wright Mills in the 1950s and 1960s who once famously summarised a 250 pages book written in tortuous syntax by the sociologist Talcott Parsons in 12 pages!

Alaister Mant extended the attack to contemporary leadership (*Leaders we Deserve* 1983 - also out of print) - puncturing somewhat the mythology about business leaders which was being spread in the popular management books which were beginning to sell like hot potatoes. Henry Mintzberg - a Canadian management academic - is about the only one who has written simply about what managers actually do (and attacked MBAs) and, in so doing, has stripped management literature of most of its pretensions.

By reducing management exhortations to 99 self-contradictory proverbs Hood's *Administrative Argument* (1991 and also, mysteriously, out of print) showed us how shallow management ideologies are.

In 1992 John Ralston Saul gave us a powerful but idiosyncratic critique of technical expertise in *Voltaire's Bastards - the dictatorship of reason in the west*.

⁷ See section 6

In 1996 Harold Perkins gave us a highly critical account of *The Third Revolution - Professional Elites in the Modern World* - whose moral critique is all the more powerful for its academic origin.

By showing the parallels with religious doctrine, Susan George challenged the economic belief systems which sustained the World Bank (*Faith and Credit - the World Bank's secular empire* (1994).

It was easier for people like Huycinski to take the scalpel to management gurus in *Management Gurus - what makes them and how to become one* (1993) since they are only peripherally of academia.

And a once worthy venture - the European Union - has, sadly, developed such powerful interests of its own that it too is part of this significant obfuscation with its use of such phrases as "subsidiarity".

5. GLOSSARY

"I don't know what you mean by 'glory,'" Alice said.

Humpty Dumpty smiled contemptuously. "Of course you don't—till I tell you. I meant 'there's a nice knock-down argument for you!'"

"But 'glory' doesn't mean 'a nice knock-down argument'," Alice objected.

"When I use a word," Humpty Dumpty said, in a rather scornful tone, "it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less."

"The question is," said Alice, "whether you can make words mean so many different things."

"The question is," said Humpty Dumpty, "which is to be master—that's all."

Alice was too much puzzled to say anything, so after a minute Humpty Dumpty began again. "They've a temper, some of them—particulaly verbs, they're the proudest—adjectives you can do anything with, but not verbs—however, I can manage the whole lot! Impenetrability! That's what I say!"

Accountability; the requirement that those in power explain - in a transparent, regular, structured and truthful way - what actions they have authorised and why. The corollary is that any failure of their explanations to satisfy will lead to sanctions - including dismissal. See also "Open Government"

Address; talk or act? fudge

Adversarial systems; the more political parties have in common (UK and US) the more they pretend to be poles apart and fight an aggressive, winner-take-all, no-holds-barred contest which leaves no room for civilised discourse; nor policy consensus. Bad policy-making is normally the result (see book references at end of Annex)

Agent; an intermediary who performs actions on behalf of another. A huge theoretical literature was built around this concept in the 1980s - to try to demonstrate the way in which public servants developed interests separate from that of the public - and to justify privatisation and the separation of public budget-holders from those who supplied public services. Pity that there are so few of these academics now bothering to develop a literature about the (actual rather than

theoretical) self-serving and downright immoral behaviour of many of those who now own and manage the privatised bodies and "arms' length" agencies!

Agencies; pretend companies - with Chief Executives and others with hugely inflated salaries and pension rights.

Agnostic; someone who doubts

Ambition; *Our system obliges us to elevate to office precisely those persons who have the ego-besotted effrontery to ask us to do so; it is rather like being compelled to cede the steering wheel to the drunkard in the back seat loudly proclaiming that he knows how to get us there in half the time. More to the point, since our perpetual electoral cycle is now largely a matter of product recognition, advertising, and marketing strategies, we must be content often to vote for persons willing to lie to us with some regularity or, if not that, at least to speak to us evasively and insincerely. In a better, purer world—the world that cannot be—ambition would be an absolute disqualification for political authority (David Hart).*

Assumptions; the things other people make - which cause problems. Parsed - "I think; you assume; (s)he fucks up". Project management techniques do require us to list assumptions and identify and manage risks - but in the field of technical Assistance these are just boxes to tick. In any project, the best approach is to list the worst things which could happen, assume they will occur and plan how to minimise their frequency and effects.

Audit; something both overdone and underdone - overdone in volume and underdone in results. A process more feared at the bottom than at the top as frequent recent scandals (Enron; global banking scandals have demonstrated). See also "Law"

Benchmark; a technical-sounding term which gives one's discourse a scientific aura.

Bottleneck; what prevents an organisation from achieving its best performance - always located at the top!

Bureaucracy; literally "rule by the office" (and the strictly defined powers which surround it - as distinct from rule by whim). See "rule of law". The adjective (bureaucratic) has now become a term of abuse.

Capacity; something which other people lack

Capacity development; something which consultants recommend and which generally boils down to some training programmes. In fact capacity is developed by a combination of practice and positive feedback.

Capital punishment; Harriet McCulloch, investigator at Reprieve, said: "Everyone knows that [capital punishment](#) means that those without the capital get the punishment.

Change; something which was difficult to start in public organisations in the 1970s and is now difficult to stop.

Change agent; in the beginning a brave person - now a spiv.

Citizen; a displaced person in the modern polis - replaced by the customer who has to have money and spend it before any rights can be exercised. For an excellent article which explores the significance and implications of the various terms and roles see [this article by Henry Mintzberg](#)

Civil servant; someone who used to be able to stand up to Ministers.

Client; someone receiving a (complex) service from a professional - usually with the protection of a professional code.

Coalition; a government composed of political parties which have normally fought one another in an election; which have not gained sufficient seats to form a majority government; and which cooperate with other parties to avoid facing the electorate again. Seen by some as highly civilised (encouraging consensual qualities) and by other as highly undemocratic (smoke-filled rooms)

Collateral damage; accidental shootings of innocent citizens.

Commodification; to put a market value on services which were previously offered voluntarily and offering them for sale on the market in order to make a profit.

Communications; the first thing which people blame when things go wrong - parsed "I communicate; you misunderstand; he/they don't listen".

Compliance; consistency with a defined outcome. Traditionally called "obedience".

Consultant; a con-man who operates like a sultan! An outsider who knows almost nothing about an organisation who is brought in to give the air of objectivity to outrageous changes the bosses have already agreed amongst themselves.

Consultation; the skill of bouncing other people to agree with what you have already decided.

Contract out; as in "put out a contract on" - to wipe out.

Control; to ensure that people do what the elites want. This used to be done by fear - but a range of clever carrots and sticks are now used - as well as words and language itself. Control used to be "ex-ante" (detailed instructions before the event) but is increasingly "ex-post" - through audit, monitoring and evaluation.

Coordination; the lack of which is the most annoying thing for the rationalist in organisations

Corruption; a fashionable thing to be against. A new anti-corruption industry of consultants has arisen which reformulates the public administration principles to which NPM (see below) is opposed, thereby generating maximum confusion. See also "integrity"

Customer; the person who has supplanted the citizen and is responsible for environmental destruction et al

Decentralisation; creating local people who can be made scapegoats for deterioration in service.

Deliberative democracy; In contrast to the traditional theory of democracy, in which voting is central, deliberative democracy theorists argue that legitimate lawmaking can arise only through public deliberation - generally through the presentation of evidence and then dissection of this in discussion - for more, see [this definition](#)

Democracy; a system which allows citizens to select, at periodical intervals, from a small group of self-selected and perpetuating elites

Development; a good thing.

environment; what's around me which I can use and abuse for my benefit.

Effectiveness; the quality of combining resources in a *harmonious* way to achieve specified objectives

Efficiency; a positive ratio between output and input. For more, see this [great discussion](#)

Empower; a classic word of the new century which suggests that power can be benignly given - when in reality it has to be taken.

Evaluation; the process of finding out who is to blame. The EU has a very traditional model of evaluation - carried out by outside experts which takes so long (and is so long and tortuous in language) that its results cannot be used in the design of new programmes. See "learning organisation" below.

Evidence-based policy-making; a phrase which represents the hubristic peak of the generation of UK social scientism which captured the UK civil service in the late 1990s at the time its political masters succumbed to corporate interests and therefore were practising less rather than more evidence-based policy-making!

Evaluation; job-creation for surplus academics. An important part of the policy-making process which has been debased by it being sub-contracted to a huge industry of consultants who produce large reports which are never read by policy-makers.

Focus group; a supposedly representative group of voters who will give us a clue about what we should be doing.

Governance; an academic term to describe the obvious - namely that governments lacked the power to do things on their own and required to work in partnership with private and others. Found useful by the World Bank - which is not allowed to engage in political activity - to conceal the fact that they were engaged on a highly ideological mission to privatise the world and to "hollow-out" government. For a useful discussion, see this [article by Gerry Stoker](#)

Good governance; from a useful insight about the importance of good government to economic and social development, it has become a pernicious phrase which is used by the global community and its experts to force developing countries to take on impossible social and political objectives. It forms the basis of the UNDP Millennium Goals. It shows great stupidity to imagine that this could be developed by a combination of moral and financial exhortations by autocracies and kleptocracies. A few voices of common sense have suggested a more appropriate strategy would be that of "[good-enough governance](#)"

Greed; something which is killing humanity and the planet - and is epitomised by ownership of an aggressive SUV; its assumed that increasing petrol prices will drive these monsters off our street - but a touch of ridicule would also help!

Groupthink; blinkered thinking which overcomes the leadership of an organisation when its culture has become too arrogant, centralised and incestuous: and when it is too protected from critical messages from and about the external world

Holistic; a magical quality - creating harmony - which some people imagine can be created in government by appropriate mechanisms of coordination. Others argue that the job will be done naturally by a mixture of decentralisation and the market.

Hubris; something which politicians and policy experts suffer from - ie a belief that their latest wheeze will solve problems which have eluded the combined skills and insights of their predecessors

Human Resource management (HRM); treating staff and workers like dirt

Humility; something which politicians and policy experts have too little of

Impact; the measured effect of an activity on identified groups.

Impact assessment; the proper (a) identification of the groups which will be affected by a policy change and (b) measurement of the economic impact of the change on those groups. Clearly, very demanding! See "systems approach"

Implementation; the act of trying to bring an intended state of affairs to fruition. The word used in the Slavic language perhaps is more powerful - execution! In the 1970s political science developed an important body of literature which showed the various ways in which the good intentions of laws were undermined. The classic book by Wildavsky and Pressman had the marvellous sub-title - "*How Great Expectations in Washington Are Dashed in Oakland; Or, Why It's Amazing that Federal Programs Work at All*". For more [see this article](#)

Input; the resources which are put into an activity

Integrity; something which NPM has cleaned out from public life. The strategy that came after anti-corruption when we needed to hide the fact that corruption was actually increasing.

Joined-up government; New Labour's euphemism for Stalinism.

Kleptocracy; A government system in which the transfer of public resources to its elite is a principles overriding any other.

Knowledge management;

Law; "the spider's webs which, if anything small falls into them ensnare it, but large things break through and escape". [Solon](#)

Leader; the head of an organisation or movement whose attributed qualities seem to range from the saintly to the diabolical. Modern leaders are supposed to exercise moral authority rather than the exercise or threat of force - but few understand what this even means.

Learning organisation; something foreign to the EU since its understanding of organisations is trapped in the Weberian model. The last 15 years has seen management theory develop a view that the best way for organisations to keep up with social change is through valuing their own staff by delegation and strong ongoing feedback - not by commissioning external experts to conduct complex and irrelevant evaluations.

Legislators; the most despised group in any society (see "parliamentary power").

Lobbyists; people who make the laws

Logframe; the bible for the Technical Assistance world which - with a list of activities, assumptions, objectives, outputs and risks - conquers the complexity and uncertainty of the world and removes the bother of creativity. For a critique see [Lucy Earle's 2003 paper on my website](#) -

Manage; to make a mess of.

Market; a place or system governed by rules which sets prices through the interaction of buyers and sellers. Under severely restrictive assumptions it can produce what economists call "optimum" results. The most important of these assumptions are - scale (large numbers of sellers; perfect information; and absence of social costs). In the real world, few of these conditions exist. See also ["quasi-market"](#)

Minister; etymologically "one who acts on the authority of another" - ie the ruler. In some countries they last some time (longer often than many civil servants); in others (eg UK) they last barely a year!

Mentor; someone whose experience has given them a high reputation - whose advice can be used to guide others. Sometime adopted as a formal role in organisations.

Modernise; to restructure something which just required some oiling of the wheels.

Monitor; a school prefect.

Neo-liberalism; one of the deadliest ideologies - some costs

New public management (NPM); the body of literature which has in the past 20 years replaced that of old public administration. It has borrowed its concepts entirely from private sector management and has encouraged governments throughout the world -

- to see the "citizen" as a "consumer" of services
- to reduce civil service skills to drafting of contracts; definition of service targets; and regulation for services which are managed at "arms-length" by the private sector, other state bodies or NGOs
- to set up reward systems and penalties to ensure targets are met

It slowly dawned even on the NPM zealots that such an approach is positively Soviet in its inflexible emphasis on targets - and that the reward systems undermine the teamwork and policy coordination which good policies require. There is now a backlash to NPM

OECD; the club of the rich nations - an apparently neutral body which was in fact one of the most important proselytisers of NPM

Open government; an apparent contradiction in terms - "governing" classically involves haggling, compromising, striking deals which will never look good in the cold light of public scrutiny. And even the publication of raw data can prove embarrassing to governments. But Freedom of Information Acts are being passed throughout the world - initially reactive rather than proactive and generally protective of "sensitive" information. Just a pity that this coincides with the run-down of investigative journalism - although a combination of citizen activists with new technology could ultimately prove a powerful combination. For [more see here](#)

Outcome; the wider societal impact which a policy seems to have.

Output; the immediate way in which the faithful implementation of a policy can be measured.

Parliamentary power; when exercised negatively (in the critique and adjustment of incoherent government proposals), something to value very highly. When exercised positively (as legislative initiatives) something to treat as "pork-trough or barrel" politics.

Performance management; the system which sets targets and rewards and penalises accordingly.

Performance-orientation; a concern for the results of inputs and spending - generally in improved customer satisfaction.

Policy; a statement of the tools and resources which government is using to try to achieve an intended set of objectives.

Policy review; the critical assessment of the outcomes and outputs of a policy field. This can be carried out within government - or by academic bodies and think-tanks and commissioned by various bodies including government.

Political party; the last bastion of scoundrels

Politician; someone elected by voters who is, in theory, accountable to them but in fact does what his party and its leadership tells him - since this is the only way to survive let alone climb the greasy pole to advancement. Rebels become mavericks.

Politics, A strife of interests masquerading as a contest of principles. The conduct of public affairs for private advantage (Bierce - Devil's Dictionary)

Populism; movements which take democracy too far.

Post-modern; distrust of explanations. "The refusal to describe humanity's progress as a rational process whose principles can be mastered - as though historical progress were one more step on the way to heaven" (from intro to *Postmodern Public Administration* by HD Millar and C Fox)

Priorities; "Gouverner", as the French say "c'est choisir". State bodies and services can never do equal justice to all the laws they are required to implement. Many new member states continue to churn out strategic documents which are checklists of good intentions - which brings the law into disrepute.

Progress; cars travelling slower in cities than 100 years ago;

Project management; a nice idea! The religion of the new generation which operates from hand to mouth on external funding. See also "assumptions" and "logframe".

Public administration; a phrase which reminds us that state bodies serve the public - not the state!!!

Public management; something more clever than public administration - which therefore warrants higher rewards and excuses shady behaviour.

Quality management; a fashionable term of the 1990s of which we now hear little.

Quasi-market; a pretend market. In the misguided attempt to introduce business systems into public services, governments have tried to get everyone to compete against one another. Naturally this requires a lot of paperwork and bureaucrats (disguised under the term "transaction costs") - which is, curiously, what the reforms were supposed to get away from! See also "side-effects".

Rationality; how many people remember the incredible debate in academic circles in the 1960s and 1970s about rationality, bureaucracy and politics – and whether it was ever possible to have significant policy changes as distinct from incremental fudge (“disjointed incrementalism” as Lindblom called it)? Now we seem to have the opposite problem. Sadly, few academics seem to be discussing it.

Reengineer; to take apart and build in a different way. A new term in the public sector for an interest that goes back to the zero-budgeting of the 1960s. Why is it I always think of Stalin's epithet for Soviet writers “Engineers of the human soul” when I hear the re-engineering word?

Reform; to divert attention from core questions by altering organisational boundaries and responsibilities

Regulation; as natural monopolies have been privatised, a vast system of public regulation has been set up to control the obvious consequences of private monopolies. See also “regulatory reform”

Regulatory reform; “reforming regulations that raise unnecessary obstacles to competition, innovation and growth, while ensuring that regulations efficiently serve important social objectives” (OECD)

Rule of law; the principle that no-one is above the law. See also “Law”.

Sceptic; an aggressive agnostic – a quality which is greatly missed these days

Scrutiny; a political form of audit which became popular in the UK recently to give local politicians something to do after local government had been stripped of most of its functions.

Services; what the outputs of government activities should give us – but rarely does.

Side-effects; unanticipated and negative impacts of policy interventions – generally more powerful than the positive. Can lead to a fatalistic view of policy-making (see Hood)

Social capital; a term brought into the currency of think-tanks and government by the combined efforts of Robert Putnam and the World Bank. Most of us understand it by the simpler trust ‘trust’. [See also here](#)

Society; what used to bear the responsibility for public services and is now being asked again to take them over (see “Big Society”)

State; a bad thing – at least for worshippers of NPM

Strategy; a statement of how an organisation understands the environment in which it is working; what problems or opportunities it sees as priority to deal with – and how it proposes to do that.

Strategic; what I consider important

Strategic management; a proactive style of management

street-level officials; a term used to describe those officials who are in close contact with the members of the public and have to exercise discretion and judgement in their behaviour (field; front-line). Its positive sense is that they often have a better sense of what the public needs than senior management. Its negative sense is that, distant from control, such officials can more easily engage in self-serving behaviour.

Subsidiarity; a term used by the Catholic hierarchy which is now part of EU rhetoric - can be used to legitimise the further stripping of state functions. Its origin lies apparently in Thomas Aquinas and the justification for government action only where private initiative is insufficient or lacking.

Sustainable; a word which, by being placed in front of development, has lost its meaning

Systems approach; an approach to management which appreciates the complexity of the environments in which interventions take place and invites teams to invent their own solutions based on a systematic definition of the problem facing the customer. [A good journal is here](#)

Targets; what those in power use to measure the performance of - and to blame - others

Teamwork; a word to beware! Generally used by those in power to get their way while seeming democratic. While true that decisions taken as a result of joint discussion can be often better (and more robust) than those imposed, a lot depends on the manner in which the discussion is held - whether it is structured in a way designed to elicit problems and ideas or, rather, to sanction a dominant view (see groupthink). See Belbin for details of teams roles and structures

Think-tank; the shock-troops of neo-liberalism. Apparently neutral bodies (funded, however, by big business) which marketed the products for the transformation of the rational-legal state into a state of neo-liberal governance.

Tools of government; the various ways government tries to make you do what they think is good for you. Laws do not implement themselves. Their implementation requires a commitment to change which cannot be taken for granted in societies whose populations are struggling to survive and whose new rulers - many uncertain of how long they will survive in office - are subject to temptations of short-term personal gains. In such contexts, is it realistic to expect policy-makers and civil servants to have an overriding concern for future public benefit? To explore that question requires us to look at the wider issue of motivation. The table sets out seven different motivations which can be found in people - and some of the policy tools which would be relevant for such motivations. Legalism, for example, assumes that people know about laws and will obey them - regardless of the pull of extended family ties (eg for recruitment). Training and functional review assumes that people simply need to understand in order to take the relevant action. Other tools assume that man is basically a calculating machine. And so on....In 2008 the British National Audit Office commissioned [a study on sanctions and rewards in the public sector](#) - the only such government review I know -. However, as Colin Talbot points out in his new book on theories of Performance, the assessment is based on discredited rationalistic theory of behaviour

Motives and tools in the change process

Motivating Factor	Example of tool	Particular mechanism
1. Understanding	Training Campaigns Counting and comparing - league tables	Rational persuasion Appeal to common sense Questioning when one's body compares badly
2. Commitment	Leadership Consultation and cooperation Training	Legitimisation; inspiration Shared vision Pride (in behaving professionally)
3. Personal Benefit	Pay increase and bonus Promotion (including political office) Good publicity Winning an award	Monetary calculation ambition Reputation; Psychological Status
4. Personal Cost	Named as poor performer Demotion Report cards	Psychological (Shame) Monetary pride
5. Obligation	Law Action plan Family ties	Courts Managerial authority Social pressure
6. Peer influence	Peer review Bribery Quality circles	Pressure from colleagues
7. Social influence	Opinion surveys	Feedback from public about service quality

Source; an earlier version of this originally appeared in Young (EU Tacis 2005)

Governments trying to improve the performance of state bodies have also made increasing use of "league tables". This involves audit bodies, for example, collecting and publishing comparative information about the performance of individual schools and hospitals in an attempt to persuade senior managers to address the problems of poor performance (1.3 in table). This can also act as a market-type force - bringing the force of public opinion against the organisation (4.3 in table).

Training; "surgery of the mind". A marvellous phrase an old political colleague of mine used to describe the mind-bending and propaganda which goes on in a lot of workshops.

Transparency; an EU buzz-word - meaning exposing the outside world to the tortuous procedures and language of the European Commission. The reaction to the coverage which Wikileaks gave to the leaked US Embassy cables shows how skindeep is the commitment to transparency.

Trust; something which economists and their models don't have and which, therefore, is assumed by them not to exist within organisations. As economic thinking has invaded public organisations, everyone has been assumed to be a "rent-seeker" - and a huge (and self-fulfilling) edifice of checks and controls have been erected

Whistle-blower; someone without authority who blows a whistle - and brings everyone down on them for the chaos they cause.

Invitation

Feedback on definitions would be much appreciated - as well as further reading and references

6. Floating in words, metaphors and language

In 1979 some British citizens became so incensed with the incomprehensible language of official documents, letters and forms that they set up a campaign called "The Plain English Campaign". It was its activities in making annual awards for good and bad practice that shamed most organisations - public and private - into reshaping their external communications. Their website www.plainenglish.co.uk contains their short but very useful manual; a list of alternative words; and lists of all the organisations which have received their awards.

But they have seem to have worked in vain - since, in 2007, the Local Government Association felt it necessary to recommend that [100 words be banned](#) (not the same thing as book burning!!), And two years later it had [expanded the list to 200 words](#) -. Some of the words have me baffled (I have not lived in the UK for 20 years!) but I find this is a quite excellent initiative. I have a feeling that it may not - in the aftermath of a General election and massive public cuts - have been taken seriously enough. The offensive words included -

Advocate, Agencies, Ambassador, Area based, Area focused, Autonomous, Baseline, Beacon, Benchmarking, Best Practice, Blue sky thinking, Bottom-Up, Can do culture, Capabilities, Capacity, Capacity building, Cascading, Cautiously welcome, Challenge, Champion, Citizen empowerment, Client, Cohesive communities, Cohesiveness, Collaboration, Commissioning, Community engagement, Compact, Conditionality, Consensual, Contestability, Contextual, Core developments, Core Message, Core principles, Core Value, Coterminality, Coterminal, Cross-cutting, Cross-fertilisation, Customer, Democratic legitimacy, Democratic mandate, Dialogue, Double devolution, Downstream, Early Win, Embedded, Empowerment, Enabler, Engagement, Engaging users, Enhance, Evidence Base, Exemplar, External challenge, Facilitate, Fast-Track, Flex, Flexibilities and Freedoms, Framework, Fulcrum, Functionality, Funding streams, Gateway review, Going forward, Good practice, Governance, Guidelines, Holistic, Holistic governance, Horizon scanning, Improvement levers, Incentivising, Income streams, Indicators, Initiative, Innovative capacity, Inspectorates (a bit unfair!), Interdepartmental surely not?), Interface, Iteration, Joined up, Joint working, level playing field, Lever (unfair on Kurt Lewin!), Leverage, Localities, Lowlights (??), Mainstreaming, Management capacity, Meaningful consultation (as distinct from meaningless?), Meaningful dialogue (ditto?), Mechanisms, menu of Options, Multi-agency, Multidisciplinary, Municipalities (why?), Network model, Normalising, Outcomes, Output, Outsourced, Overarching, Paradigm, Parameter, Participatory, Partnership working, Partnerships, Pathfinder, Peer challenge, Performance Network, Place shaping, Pooled budgets, Pooled resources, Pooled risk, Populace, Potentialities, Practitioners (what's wrong with that?), Preventative services, Prioritization, Priority, Proactive (damn!), Process driven, Procure, Procurement, Promulgate, Proportionality, Protocol,

Quick win (damn again), Rationalisation, Revenue Streams, Risk based, Robust, Scaled-back, Scoping, Sector wise, Seedbed, Self-aggrandizement (why not?), service users, Shared priority, Signpost, Social contracts, Social exclusion, spatial, Stakeholder, Step change, Strategic (come off it!), Strategic priorities, Streamlined, Sub-regional, Subsidiarity (hallelujah); Sustainable (right on!), sustainable communities, Symposium, Synergies, Systematics, Taxonomy, Tested for Soundness, Thematic, Thinking outside of the box, Third sector, Toolkit, Top-down (?), Trajectory, Tranche, Transactional, Transformational, Transparency, Upstream, Upward trend, Utilise, Value-added, Vision, Visionary,

And what about coach, mentor, drivers, human resource management, social capital, tsar ????

Anyway - a brilliant initiative (if you will forgive the term)

And in 2009 a UK Parliamentary Committee actually invited people to submit examples of confusing language which they then reported about in a report entitled [Bad Language!](#)

I suppose if post-modernists have done anything, they have made us more aware of language. After all, they spend their time deconstructing texts! And they have been active in the field of public administration - [Postmodern Public Administration](#) (2007) is one taken at random - The trouble is that they play so many word games amongst themselves that what they produce is generally incomprehensible to the outsider. Despite their critiques and claims, therefore, I do not consider them helpful companions.

Before the post-modernists came along, M Edelman's book [The Symbolic Use of Politics was published in 1964 but then ignored - not least by myself.](#)

I have never found Chomsky an easy companion - but clearly books like his [Language and politics](#) (1988) are highly relevant to this theme

One of the most insightful texts for me, however, is Gareth Morgan's *Images of Organisation* - a fascinating treatment of the writing about organisations which demonstrates that many of our ideas about them are metaphorical : he suggests the literature uses eight "images" viz organisations as "political systems", as "instruments of domination", as "cultures", as "machines", as "organisms", as "brains", as "psychic prisons", as "flux and transformation" and as "instruments of domination".

<http://www.civilservant.org.uk/jargon.pdf>

<http://www.thepoke.co.uk/2011/05/17/anglo-eu-translation-guide/>

7. The role of international agencies in creating La Pensée Unique

The World Bank is not allowed to engage in political activity and promulgated various words (governance; social capital) to conceal the fact that they were engaged on a highly ideological mission to privatise the world and to "hollow-out" government. The OECD has perhaps been an even more effective proselytiser through the way it brings practitioners together with researchers and issues publications selling NPM.

8. The importance of satire

Satire has long been a powerful weapon against the pretensions of power - Voltaire's *Candide* and Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* are well-known literary examples. Ralph Steadman and Gerard Scarfe are modern caricaturists in the tradition of Hogarth; and the Liverpool poets (McGough) sustained the protestors of the 1960s. British people are not so familiar with the Bert Brecht's City poems or the savage anti-bourgeois paintings of Georg Grosz in the 1920s and 1930s.

A more recent powerful satirical essay "Democracy, Bernard? It must be stopped!" was penned by the author of the *Yes Minister* TV series and exposes the emptiness behind the rhetoric about democracy and government. It is available only on my website at -

http://www.freewebs.com/publicadminreform/key%20papers/Democracy%20Yes%20Minister_.pdf

In 1987 Management Professor Rosabeth Kanter produced "Ten Rules for Stifling Initiative" <http://nomadron.blogspot.com/2009/10/ten-rules-for-stifling-innovation.html> which I have often used to great effect in Central Asian training sessions.

1999 saw the appearance of *The Lugano Report: on preserving capitalism in the twenty-first Century* which purported to be a leaked report from shady big business but was in fact written by Susan George.

Management guru Russell Ackoff's great collection of tongue-in-cheek laws of management - [*Management F-Laws - how organisations really work*](#) (2007) As the blurb put it - "They're truths about organizations that we might wish to deny or ignore - simple and more reliable guides to managers' everyday behaviour than the complex truths proposed by scientists, economists and philosophers". An added bonus is that British author, Sally Bibb, was asked to respond in the light of current organizational thinking. Hers is a voice from another generation, another gender and another continent. On every lefthand page is printed Ackoff and Addison's f-Law with their commentary. Opposite, you'll find Sally Bibb's reply. A short version ([13 Sins of management](#)) can be read here. A typical rule is - "The more important the problem a manager asks consultants for help on, the less useful and more costly their solutions are likely to be".

Robert Greene's *48 Laws of Power* may not be satire but it is a very salutary counter to the thousands of unctuous management texts which attribute benign motives to senior management. I have already referred to the [spoof on the British Constitution](#) produced recently by Stuart Weir which is another good example of the power of satire -

9. The way forward (or back?)

Ever since my acquaintance with Uzbek President Karamov's philosophy of incremental "step-by-step" change, this metaphor of steps has always amused me. As I would mischievously say to the officials I met in training sessions, simply putting one step in front of the other can often take us round in circles!

As I've worked on these words - and been reminded of various key texts which have, over the centuries, tried to puncture the pretensions and deceptions of the powerful and the guardians of "knowledge" which sustained them - I have realised how rare this endeavour has been. Only the specialised cognoscenti have the knowledge and authority to undertake the effort - and they have too much to lose!

Of course the discipline of economics, for example, is now subjected to a lot of criticism and adjustment (at least on its edges) - and post-modernists have cleverly dissected bodies of knowledge - but hardly in a reader-friendly language!

But we are overdue a text which will give the average interested citizen the incentive to understand just how weak are the intellectual justifications for so much of the behaviour of modern elites - and satire and ridicule will probably be important elements in such an expose.

10. Further Reading

In addition to the texts quoted in the introduction above, I would add the following as useful companions in the search for understanding -

The Art of the State - culture, rhetoric and public management; Chris Hood (2000)

The Future of Governing - four emerging models; B Guy Peters (1999)

Market-driven politics - neo-liberal democracy and the public interest; Colin Leys (2003)

[*How Mumbo-jumbo conquered the world*](#); Francis Wheen (2004)

Books like *Great Planning Disasters* (Peter Hall 1982) and *Seeing Like a State - how certain schemes to improve the human condition have failed* (James Scott 1998) showed us how bad centralised decision-making could be - and Tony Travers (*Failure in British Government: the politics of the poll tax* 1994).

Christian Wolmar (*The Great Railway Disaster* 1996) and Allyson Pollock (*NHS plc*) showed us how wasteful the private end of the spectrum was. For the effect on transition [countries see here](#)

Paulo Freire (*Pedagogy of hope - reliving The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* 1994); Robert Chambers (*Whose Reality Counts? - putting the first last* 1997); and Tony Gibson (*The Power in our Hands* 1996) are all important inspirations for those who believe in putting the ordinary citizen in the driving seat.

Mintzberg's [*The management of government*](#) (2000) is one of the most thoughtful contributions to the question of how we should organise government.

Daniel Dorling's recent *Injustice - why social inequality persists* gives us not only a lot of useful material but, even more importantly, the suggestion that 5 belief sets sustain contemporary inequality - that elitism is efficient; greed is good; exclusion is necessary; prejudice is natural; and despair inevitable.

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

Decade	Themes of intellectual discussion	Key names
1930s	The managerial revolution End of capitalism	J Burnham J Strachey
1940s	Keynesism Meritocracy New world order	JM Keynes
1950s	End of ideology Revisionism Private affluence/public squalour	D. Bell A. Shonfield; Tony Crosland JK Galbraith
1960s	Worship of scale Modernisation of society Participation critique of professionals	Peter Berger Pateman; Ivan Illich
1970s	Costs of economic growth Collapse of welfare state Small is beautiful Change corporatism	EJ Mishan Buchanan E. Schumacher; L. Kohr S. Beer; A. Toffler; D. Schon Cawson
1980s	Deindustrialisation Privatisation Pursuit of excellence ecology decentralisation globalisation	Blackaby; Dyson Consultancies; World Bank Tom Peters James Lovelock OECD Stiglitz, Martin Wolf
1990s	End of history Flexibility and reengineering Reinvention of government; NPM Climate change The learning organisation Washington consensus	Fukayama OECD Scientific community Senge World Bank
2000s	Good governance Neo-liberalism and its limits Environmental collapse Migration and social integration state building	World bank; OECD Naomi Klein Scientific community C Cauldwell F Fukuyama
2010s	Migration The financial system AI, robots, future of work	everyone Stiglitz

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 27 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 propaganda 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".

His website - [Mapping the Common Ground](#) - 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 \(post-capitalist?\) future generation](#) (2018)

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

[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?