

## Social Development Reconsidered: A Eulogy for the United Nations World Summit for Social Development

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### Introduction

Since the end of the East-West military-ideological bipolarity in 1990, the world's attention has been increasingly focused upon the North-South ecologic-economic dichotomy. The Rio Global Summit in 1992 brought out this point with the confrontation of the world's contradictory priorities: environment *versus* development, whose dialectical synthesis or diplomatic compromise is captured in the slogan of "sustainable development".

The crucial question now is whether this new promising ideal will fare any better than the old failed ones. In the historical perspective of four development decades, the answer is very doubtful at best. From the western modernisation thesis of the sixties, through the New International Economic Order of the seventies, to the world systems or *dependencia* antithesis of the eighties, the sustainable development of the nineties may seem like progress.

Deep concerns however remain that all these attempts are little more than cosmetic exercises in futility, while time is running out for essential reforms. At the fiftieth anniversary year of the UN, the 1995 Summit for Social Development culminated the elusive search for a better way of reaffirming the validity of development, considering obstacles to its achievement, and outlining policies for its attainment.

This paper attempts to contribute to this search by questioning the validity of the concept as it is understood now. The hypothesis here is that social development (SD) can only be carried out at the expense of both environmental and individual development. As a zero sum game, it is impossible to maximise all values of social, natural and human development simultaneously and globally.

Our thesis then emphasises both the necessity and desirability of refining and defining development, so as to fit it in an optimal combination of conflicting and contradictory values. To do so, it relies heavily upon the theory of sociophysics which posits a close and direct relationship between individual, social and natural systems.

This approach is applied in a two dimensional (modal- model) framework. The first considers each of the terms in the title "Social Development Reformed" as the chapters of this essay, proceeding in a descriptive, ascriptive and prescriptive manner. The second treats the domains of our discourse represented by the social system in its natural context and human content as the three sections of each chapter.

Within these general parameters, SD can be seen in its proper perspective, thus clarifying this elusive concept, criticising its current interpretation and proposing the directions for its reform.

## 1. Society

We begin with the term **social** in the title, treating it in itself as well as in its context and content. This means that we consider society as a system which can only exist within the context of nature and as such is utterly dependent upon it. The classical Aristotelian dichotomy between *physis* (nature) and *techne* (culture) is thus well taken to signify this separation.

Upon it, we first discuss the natural environment which contains society and last the human element which is contained within it. Our order of priority then starts at the macroscopic level of the global environment, proceeds to the mesoscopic level of the social system and ends with the microscopic level of the human personality.

### 1.1 *Environmental Context*

Every system exists in an environment. For society, the environment is primarily and indispensably nature. The components of the earth are both organic and inorganic elements of great variety which form

complex conglomerations and hierarchical structures in dynamic equilibrium. So much so, that the Gaia Hypothesis considers the earth's biosphere as a living organism of planetary proportions.

Taken together, human society and global ecology coexist asymmetrically; the former is parasitic upon the latter. Without the matter, energy and information inputs from nature, no society can survive. Exploiting nature is indispensable to social life, so natural resources are the *sine qua non* of social existence.

If we consider the world as a single social system, then its only direct and immediate environment is the natural ecosphere of planet earth. Whatever happens among the internal components of the world, ie. international affairs; its external relations with the earth are primordial.

Throughout the eons of social existence, these relations were very important for societies, but insignificant for nature because of the incredible size differential between these two domains. Now, however, the difference has diminished to the point of convergence. As a result, the impact of the social system upon the natural environment has grown substantially.

Unfortunately, most of these impacts are negative or malignant, thereby creating grave problems both for nature and culture. Without going into details, these problems fall in three categories:

- Pollution: urban; industrial; hazardous; wastes; warming;
- Erosion: degradation; desertification; salination; sedimentation;
- Depletion: scarcity; water; ozone; biodiversity; extinction.

Global environmental atmospheric (hyperthermia, deozonefication, acidity), terrestrial (deforestation, desertification, infestation) and aquatic (inundation, dehydration, salination) problems, are all associated to large- scale social production and consumption.

The feedbacks from these activities increase agricultural infertility, economic decline, population displacement and social disruption. The hyperentropy associated with fossil fuel burning, ozone layer depleting, and toxic substance accumulating thus threatens not only humanity but all life on earth. It is therefore necessary to look into the root cause of this global pathology by examining the essence of human society.

### 1.2 *Social System*

Before going any further, it is now time to identify explicitly our focus. Among the various sociological definitions, we have chosen to describe societies as systems (interrelated, interacting, interdependent groups) of people along with their creations and possessions, who occupy a certain territory over a period of time: ie.  $S_t = f(h, a, p)$ .

Accordingly, the internal parameters of the world society are:

- Material components: humanity; commodity; property.
- Functional attributes: economic; cultural; political.
- Geographical structures: local; regional; global.

The definition of any system implies the existence of an outside environment. In the case of a society, its environment consists of foreign societies and its enveloping nature. Thus to the internal content, must be added an external context.

As open systems, societies have inter- as well as intra- social activities. These systemic variables or flows are:

- Inputs-Imports: raw materials; potential energy; information.
- Throughputs-Feedbacks: extraction; conversion; consumption.
- Outputs-Exports: goods; services; wastes; pollution; entropy.

In a social system, it is obvious that the output is a function of the inputs and transformation processes, ie.  $O = f(I, T)$ , which for a balanced system reduces to  $O = KI$ . Otherwise the system increases or

decreases proportionately and relatively to its environment. This important point is crucial to SD and will be discussed separately in the next chapter.

As the world becomes increasingly interdependent, it acquires the attributes of a planetary supersystem whose components are 200 geopolitical states, 2,000 ethnocultural nations, and 20,000 socioeconomic corporations. In such a world, everything that happens in any domain affects the others in some way.

Although the world is undoubtedly a society, it is by no means a community, let alone a "global village." For a community is a strong, well-integrated, tightly knit society: a social system of closely shared values, duties, standards, interests, history and destiny.

On the contrary, the confrontation of ideologies, conflicts of interest, and contention of lifestyles among different regions, nations, and states make the world a loose community at best. The maldistribution of power and wealth, as well as the overutilisation of violence and incompatibility of opinions are intractable social problems in a global scale.

On the contrary, the absence of such problems in the organic colonies (beehives and anthills) of social animals make them the most developed communities extant. This qualitative difference puts a community at a higher level than a society and, as we see later on, is a crucial variable on the road to SD.

### 1.3 *Human Content*

Ultimately, the sociophysical realm impacts upon the human being, who is the creature of both culture and nature, as well as the creator of the former and increasingly the disturber of the latter. Aristotle was the first to recognise this human duality when he said: *anthropos zoon politikon*. These two aspects of mankind are still distinguished as its primary (animal) and secondary (cultural) nature. Both aspects, therefore, affect in different periods, positions and proportions all human life.

It is not our intention here to praise man, whose high potential and great plasticity makes for both lofty acts as well as despicable deeds. Rather, we note the most critical problems of the human condition. Of the many ailments of mankind, the following three categories cover the principal ones:

- Physical: malnutrition, disease, unhygiene, debility.
- Mental: illiteracy, ignorance, superstition, alienation.
- Emotional: deviance, disorientation, demoralisation.

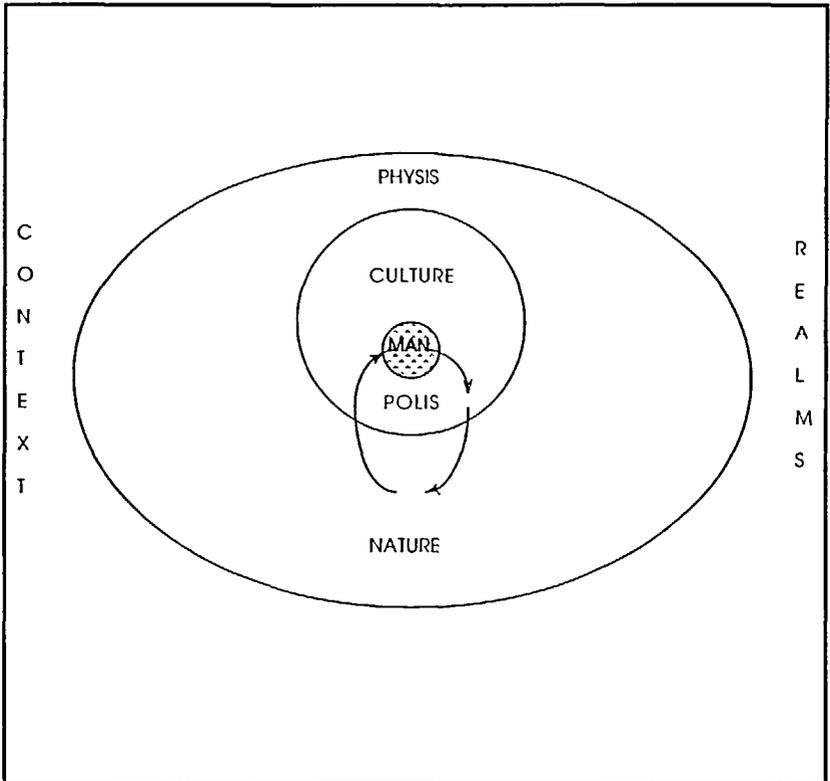
Unlike other species, *homo sapiens* suffer from both physiological and psychological pathologies brought about by the unhealthy and unnatural environments they developed. As a result the overall picture presents a critical situation which exacerbates rather than moderates the basic human needs of most people.

The Descriptive Diagram overleaf summarises this diagnosis by illustrating the three realms discussed above. The arrows between them show the principal causal impact flows which create the vicious circle of increasing positive feedbacks resulting in the global problematique.

The critical issues of the contemporary world deal with the triple problem of production-distribution-consumption. Firstly, the population explosion which doubles mankind every few decades is a serious human problem of global proportions which cannot go on for very long. Secondly, the uneven development of the world's regions which plagues the modern world is both a geopolitical and socioeconomic threat to stability of the whole system. Thirdly, the industrial growth which is destroying the natural environment by taking out of it too many raw materials and throwing into it too many waste by-products.

These interrelated megaproblems: First-world overconsumption; Third-world overpopulation and Global overpollution; thus set the

stage for our present malaise which all development efforts so far have hardly alleviated.



## 2. Development

From the structural statics discussed above, we now move to their functional dynamics by introducing the time element into the space scene. In this way, we go beyond the content and context of social systems to consider the changes taking place in different domains.

Since the particular change of interest here is development, we shall approach this concept in the same way as the previous one. Accordingly, we distinguish three different processes: natural evolution, social development and human progress, each of which

corresponds to the domains identified above. Our task here is to investigate the propriety of metaphors between organic, social and personal changes and ascribe their formal attributes.

### 2.1 *Natural Evolution*

A dictionary definition of development includes several verbs: unwrap, uncover, unfold, emerge, expose, manifest, realise, actualise, activate, energise, mobilise, enable, grow, expand, advance, promote, progress, graduate, improve, mature, cultivate, educate, reform, raise, valorise, compose, incorporate, integrate, inform.

From this multiplicity of acts, it seems that development is a many splendoured thing with multiple traits. In order to cover them all, we must look at various kinds of processes of which living systems undergo three major ones: metabolic, developmental and evolutionary. Let us discuss each one in reverse order of duration.

First and foremost is the cyclic process of metabolism by which organisms maintain themselves in life. This process transforms matter into energy needed for activity and must be repeated every few hours at a time. Since this is a repetitive- maintenance process, it does not properly speaking effect systemic change, so it is not so important here.

Much more significant is development which changes the system progressively in the longer run. In this sense, development means organic growth by which a system realises its potential. Accordingly, development is a vector of inherent actualisation and optimisation or a process of becoming, unfolding, emerging, fulfilling, and maturing. It is the *tao* of life, leading to its destiny.

Development denotes the process whereby potential becomes kinetic energy. This connotes a transformation of an existential potentiality into an actual reality. In doing so, this directed conversion leads towards the amelioration of a system's structural-functional capability. This makes development a

qualitative change which improves the state and operation of a system.

From the above explanation, development follows in three phases:

Start —————>	Climax —————>	End
Birth	Maturity	Death

In order to do that, development needs the following parameters:

- Plans: organisation, blueprint, genetic pattern.
- Programmes: algorithm: birth-maturity-death.
- Resources: matter, energy, space, time.

The objective of development is to enable the system to acquire:

- Quantitative Increase: Structural Extension (Physical Addition).
- Qualitative Improvement: Functional Specialisation (Efficient Operation)
- Quidditive Integration: Controlled Improvisation (Problem Solution).

As a result, we can hypothesise that development is an algorithm seeking to attain a predetermined goal. As a teleologic process, development must be prescribed and circumscribed; it does not go on haphazardly or indefinitely.

In distinction to development, evolution is a much slower and longer vector of cumulative, selective, random, negentropic mutation. As a teleonomic process, it increases an organism's chances for self-preservation, self-organisation, and self-determination, without having a predetermined end. The parameters of this macrochronic process are thus:

- Existential: protective, enabling, metabolic.
- Propagational: reproductive, genetic, recreative.
- Transcendental: cybernetic, creative, introspective.

As systems evolve, they acquire these characteristic qualities:

- Variety: numerical increase: extensive spread, biodiversity.
- Complexity: interdependent coexistence, differentiation, specialisation.
- Hierarchy: structural order, centralised control, progressive refinement.

On the basis of those givens, the evolutionary process alternates linear progression with quantum jumps, ie. dynamic punctuated equilibria. An evolved system is homeostatic in that its stability is a function of its complexity and variety. Ultimately, this homeostatic process leads to higher organisms, culminating with the emergence of self-conscious systems like humans.

## *2.2 Social Development*

On the basis of the above definition of general development, we are now able to determine social development much more objectively. Without it, SD could arbitrarily mean anything one wishes and so it often does to everyone's consternation and misunderstanding.

From this perspective, SD is not simply greater social security or improved welfare services in a community. As philanthropic as such popular definitions might be, they are too sociocentric and ideological to serve as generic concepts.

Instead, our definition here is simply that SD is a vector towards greater integration, optimisation, and sophistication of the system. We can therefore propose that SD is a holistic structural change involving all aspects of society. If not, it can only be qualified as

specific to one or another social sector. Indeed, what poses as development so far, is primarily economic or industrial and little else.

Overall SD, on the contrary, includes the entire system:

- Economic Wealth: extensive material growth: mass, density, production, (structuration, solidification, differentiation).
- Cultural Health: intensive functional performance: specialisation, (operationalisation, optimisation).
- Political Stealth: progressive problem-solving empowerment: strategy, (rationalisation, information, planning).

This means that a social, like an organic system, develops by increasing its capacity to act as a coordinated, effective and efficient unit. A developed society optimises its position, rationalises its policies, and ensures its possessions. It therefore becomes better in resolving conflicts, surviving threats and propagating itself in time and place.

Assuming the above definition and elaboration, we should note an important proviso: every value is subject to diminishing returns, because anything carried to extremes becomes counterproductive. Thus, development is good only up to a point. Beyond it, overdevelopment; as before it, underdevelopment, is bad. The following table makes this point.

UNDERDEVELOPED ———>	DEVELOPED ———>	OVERDEVELOPED
Infantile Ignorance Poverty Raw Birth Rise	Mature Knowledge Sufficiency Ripe Life Climax	Senile Sophistry Luxury Rotten Death Fall

Societies tend to develop in this way, following the classic sigmoid curve of slow initial, fast transitional and slow final growth. This pattern is repeated in inverse with the inevitable decline and fall of the system.

Moving from development to evolution means crossing from the short to the long term. Social evolution follows the strength-depth vector from simple to complex life in its economic, cultural and political aspects:

SIMPLICITY —————>	—————>	COMPLEXITY —————>
Pastoral —————>	Agricultural —————>	Industrial —————>
Primitive —————>	Traditional —————>	Modern —————>
Instinctive —————>	Dictatorial —————>	Constitutional —————>

Since we have already noted the distinction between society and community, we can now add that community development goes further than social development along the road to collective solidarity, fraternity, loyalty, identity, and homogeneity. Community development, therefore, is a derivative, cumulative, dialectic process which transforms a social into an organic system.

With this definition, interpretation and distinction of social development and evolution, we can see that although there is some relationship among different types of development or evolution, there is no direct correlation between them. Societies may advance one way or another, more or less, but rarely in a measured and balanced manner.

### *2.3 Human Progress*

With the above elucidation of natural and social development, we can now focus on the centrepiece of our concerns: the human being. Using the same definition of development as the other two systems, we must say that as it develops, any entity, whether individual or collective, becomes more integrated and coordinated, adherent and coherent, thus attaining an integrity and identity, distinction, and personality, as well as recognition of its self-worth.

Following our trimodal model, we can state that development implies:

- Self-reliance, leading to metabolic self-sufficiency; autarky;
- Self-government, leading to cybernetic self-control; autarchy;
- Self-consciousness, leading to informatic self- emancipation; autognosis.

According to this general definition of development which applies to any dynamic entity, it is obvious that overlapping levels cannot develop simultaneously. Inclusive systems, as the individual, society, environment, can only develop at the expense of each other. As a system develops its overall integrity, its parts must sacrifice their separate identities. Similarly, if humans develop their individuality, they detract from the collective development of their society.

Groups, as well as individuals, compete for their development, so in a scarce resource environment, everyone cannot develop simultaneously. Accordingly, increased production rivals improved distribution. Economic growth tries to accumulate new wealth, whereas social welfare tries to distribute the existing one. But, since wealth accumulation competes with equitable redistribution, both cannot be maximised at the same time and place. Consequently, in spite of decades of SD for some people, the maldistribution of wealth persists and disparities are still with us.

Similarly, a highly developed individual, whether organic or social, cannot coexist within a very developed collective, whether local or global, because such system reduces its individuals to integrated components. Individualism is anathema to socialism, just as urbanism is contradictory to naturalism. Thus each system's development attempts compete with all the others in the zero-sum game of life. The success of one means the failure of the other, just as there is a cost associated to every benefit.

As the ultimate product of natural evolution, humanity emerged both a paragon and a parasite upon the face of the earth, due to the superior quality and quantity of its impacts. Either way, we may define human progress as the combined effect of both: ie.

**Human Progress = Natural Evolution + Social Development.**  
 ie.  $dH/dt = dN/dt + dS/dt$

Unfortunately, this equality not only represents progress but also problems, because self-consciousness inevitably leads to self-assertiveness. In that sense, culture and nature are negatively correlated: as one increases, the other decreases. As cultural training supplements natural programming, humanity moves away from its genetic roots and develops a new artificial life. Acculturation or civilisation is precisely the process away from nature and into nurture.

Moreover, the rapidity of social development, compared with the glaciality of natural evolution creates sharp discontinuities, resulting in social turbulence, political instability and moral turpitude. Natural instincts or genetic predilections are repressed at a psychological and biological price which modern man is now paying at a premium.

In wrapping up this chapter, we can now state our overall thesis: given entropy, natural, social and human development can at best add up to a constant in the long run:

$$dN/dt + dS/dt + dH/dt = K$$

which means that the more there is of any of these, the less there is left for the others. So, if we carry SD too far, it will detract from natural evolution and human progress.

### 3. Reform

The apparently pessimistic conclusion of the above argument cannot be left as the last word on the subject. Recent history attests to the difficulty if not impossibility of realising such conflicting objectives as natural, social and personal development. As a result, the two dominant contemporary ideologies have both foundered on the shoals of their development policies. Whether it is modernism, the north-western liberal-capitalist and free market gradualist approach, or socialism, the third world *dependencia* and central planning protectionist dogma, development theory has rarely been successfully applied in practice.

The first such theory was elaborated by the capitalist modernity school which shaped the First United Nations Development Decade of the sixties. It was followed and opposed by the socialist dependency school, which underlined the Second Development Decade and the call for a NIEO in the seventies. Neither of these roads was very successful, so more sophisticated ideas were introduced, the most innovative of which was the world system school, elaborated during the Third Development Decade of the eighties.

These three schools epitomise the first generation of development thinking and complete the first cycle of its historical dialectic, with the modernisation thesis confronting the socialisation antithesis, and concluding with the world- system synthesis.

The first generation also coincided with the cold war period which pitted eastern and western ideologies against each other throughout the world. The dramatic events of 1990, however, demanded a complete rethinking of development, given that both communism and industrialism were on the way out. The launching of the Fourth Development Decade of the nineties was thus caught in a theoretical upheaval and ideological vacuum from which it still has not been able to escape. So we are still groping in the dark as to where we go from here.

This search for direction also involves the ongoing debate between neomalthusians and cornucopians. This dichotomy is not so much one between realists and idealists as between pessimists and optimists. Even though there is something to be said for both sides, accumulating global problems lean the argument towards the former. The multiple coinciding syndromes of good scarcities and bad abundances are rapidly accelerating to critical proportions which overwhelm the response of social institutions.

Realising these contradictions, we are faced with the challenge of resolving them. Even if we cannot maximise both human and social development, let alone artificial innovation and natural evolution, we

could look for ways of optimising these human values by modulating the extreme manifestations of each.

This we try to do by highlighting the salient points made above and drawing the appropriate conclusions of the previous arguments. These revolve around the three most significant traits of development: equilibrium; accommodation; and control. In the following sections, these traits will be amplified as they apply to the natural, social and personal domains which we have used throughout this study.

### *3.1 Natural Harmony*

The slow pace of evolution makes natural processes rather homeostatic. Measured in human time scales, nature is a constant context of our activities, so its most pervading quality is the preservation of its equilibrium. This Gaia has been able to do by its own servomechanisms for millennia.

Throughout all this time, nature managed its own affairs without the help of humanity, but at the same time without significant human disturbance or interference. With its sophisticated self-correcting checks and balances, Gaia maintained the necessary conditions for life to evolve and flourish on this planet.

The fundamental principle guiding this evolution seem to be the cyclic propagation and accommodation of complementary contradictions: ie. order-chaos; creation-destruction; competition-cooperation; life-death. These antithetical conditions and opposing processes evolve in self-perpetuating spirals within a finely calibrated and dynamically equilibrated framework operating within proper limits and avoiding incorrigible extremes.

As a result, in spite of various disturbances and many catastrophies, nature managed to maintain its composure and preserve its constitution in an even handed way. This miracle of complex interdependence and progressive conservation is due to the flexible regulation of coexistential variety and selected application of

natural law. Therefore, behind the phenomenal conflicts and ephemeral confusions of everyday life, can be glimpsed the steady state of cosmic order and holistic harmony.

### 3.2 *Social Restraint*

Given the above limits of nature, it behooves society to either go along with them and make our life easier or go beyond them and enter the *terra incognita* of danger and adventure. The fact that we have fallen into the latter option is reflected in the multitude of novelties and problems accompanying pseudodevelopment.

True development, on the other hand, must respect natural constraints and proceed along their sense of direction. From what we have said about nature and its relation to culture, the only sustainable option for social development is based upon response, respect, and restraint.

Presently, the UN tries to effect SD as a way of fulfilling basic human needs. This general objective is supposed to be attained by specific policies aiming to eliminate structural unemployment; reduce the culture of poverty; and increase community integration. In our terminology, these policies translate into:

- Economic growth: raising standard of living; wealth; comfort; efficiency employment, income, consumption, shelter
- Cultural depth: improving quality of life; social welfare and security education, beauty, hygiene, fertility
- Political spread: integrating public life: order; law; control; power government; access; sovereignty; safety.

These laudable goals however can come about through various strategies, three of which are most likely:

- Technomodernist: continuation of economic growth as far as it can go.

- Ecoidealist: reverse industrial production and return to natural basics.
- Holorealist: deflect development towards non-material growth.

In order to be successful, these strategies must resolve the dilemmas between social development vs. natural evolution and economic growth vs. personal progress. The problem in attempting such resolution stems from the: economic impossibility of indefinite wealth production; political difficulty of equitable power distribution; and cultural undesirability of antimaterialist paradigm.

Postmodern society cannot solve its problems either by increasing production or improving distribution. The former is prohibitive because of the increasing scarcity and decreasing availability of resources. The latter because it rewards mediocrity and punishes incentive. More effective in the long run would be to reshape human needs and social wants by raising nonmaterial values.

Since it is impossible to maximise all values, the most desirable development policy can only be sustained by respecting nature and adapting to its exigencies. Such policy must be able to base cultural values upon natural laws and thus subordinate the human ego and sociosystems to their global environments. Since SD crushes individualism and squeezes environmentalism, it must be subsumed to both.

This is possible if social development focuses on improving net satisfaction by increasing Benefits and decreasing Costs, without depleting capital Stocks beyond natural entropy. Increasing the ratio:  $(B-C/S)$ , while keeping S constant; instead of raising B and C by lowering S as modern economic growth does. A steady-state society can do that by concentrating on intensive, intangible, inclusive services and public goods, rather than extensive, expansive, exclusive material commodities and private consumption; thus putting Quality of Life above Standard of Living.

At this stage of evolution, nature needs much more care than humanity. As people increase and trees decrease, the latter become more valuable than the former; not necessarily of their intrinsic worth but because plants can exist without humans and not vice versa. In the present conditions where depopulation is preferable to deforestation, the primary function of society becomes to reestablish the proper balance by protecting nature from the excessive exploitation of man. The old Social Contract must therefore be supplemented by a new Natural Contract: the *Magna Terra Carta* of an emerging global order.

In any case, such a dynamic equilibrium is not only the most desirable option but the most probable outcome of evolution. One way or another, sooner or later, nature imposes its laws upon interlopers by either fitting them in or killing them out. The only question is whether the rebalancing will be to prevent a looming catastrophe or as a result of it to start anew after another deluge.

Nature, of course, has gotten along without culture for a long time, but the ecosystem is not likely to be the same ever again. The extraordinary power of modern society thus confers upon it great responsibility. Since we have acquired the capability to alter the natural order of things, social activities should proceed with a light hand and measured step. Above all, they must avoid irrevocable decisions, irreversible actions and irremediable results.

Based on scarce resources, incomplete information, and limited intelligence, responsible social development can only proceed with prudence. The principle of precaution is therefore the policy of post-modernism and a strategy of circumspection is the order of the day.

### 3.3 *Human Control*

All human decisions are made not only on incomplete information, but by imperfect processing systems. Although the human brain is the most powerful organic computer extant, it still cannot understand

all the nuances of the complexity which surrounds it. As Godel's Theorem demonstrates, no system can comprehend a more complex one.

Under the circumstances, humanity exists in a partly understandable reality and on that basis has unleashed forces which it can hardly control. We thus find ourselves in a disorienting condition whose puzzling problems we can barely fathom, yet whose outcome may mean life or death not only for our species but for the entire ecosystem.

The dilemma humanity now faces is how to deal with the dangerously powerful tools it created by its bounded rationality. Having taken the road from natural instinct to cultural thinking, we must do self-consciously what the rest of creation does automatically. Since natural evolution has blessed or condemned us in this direction, we have to follow it as the way of human progress.

Our thinking and doing, however, are out of step: the former lagging behind the latter. Perhaps nature created the monster that can destroy it, or experimented with an ephemeral aberration that will self-destruct before things can return to normal. Either way, it is now evident that humanity has overstepped the bounds of nature and is fast facing its finest hour.

Theoretically, our self-conscious choice presents three options:

- Natural: return and evolve in step with the rest of creation;
- Social: participate and integrate within organic collective development;
- Personal: compete and promote individual excellence and self-reliance.

The first option is hardly feasible, since a return to nature for most people means undoing what has already been done and unlearn what we already know. This leaves one alternative between the other two options. Either effect social development by submerging our

individuality in a holistic community, or emphasise egocentric development by maximising the agonistic spirit of individualism in a struggle for survival of the fittest.

The rise of individualism, materialism, and commercialism were great blows to traditional community spirit. The glue that holds social systems together is the trust that people have in their social institutions to keep public order and social security. Under normal conditions, it is this trust that stands between civilisation and barbarism. Tearing apart the fabric of community leaves men naked in the jungle of natural law.

In turbulent times, this trust erodes when people lose faith in their community's protective capacity. A shrinking economy brings out the worst in people who have to fight for less by doing more cutthroat actions. When this happens, people can only depend on their own powers and act accordingly in a dog eat dog world, where egoisms run rampant. When people only depend on themselves, community spirit is lost to ragged individualism. Antisocial behaviour, underground economy, political treason flourish.

The other side of the coin, of course, is the loss of individual responsibility and competitiveness. In a highly developed society where the individual is taken care of from the cradle to the grave, personal initiative is discouraged and incentive is destroyed. The apathy of people and the atrophy of their spirit in totalitarian societies attest to this inevitable outcome to collective and regimented life.

Moreover, people are not so altruistic as to willingly share their possessions. Beyond a certain point, they will rather pay for protection than for distribution. Who pays for SD is always an important question, since those who pay are not necessarily those who benefit. The limits to social welfare are obviously reached when tax revolts and flight of capital become common practice.

Unfortunately, immediate consumption benefits are made at the expense of ultimate negative externalities. Long-term investment always lacks behind short-term needs, so social welfare takes

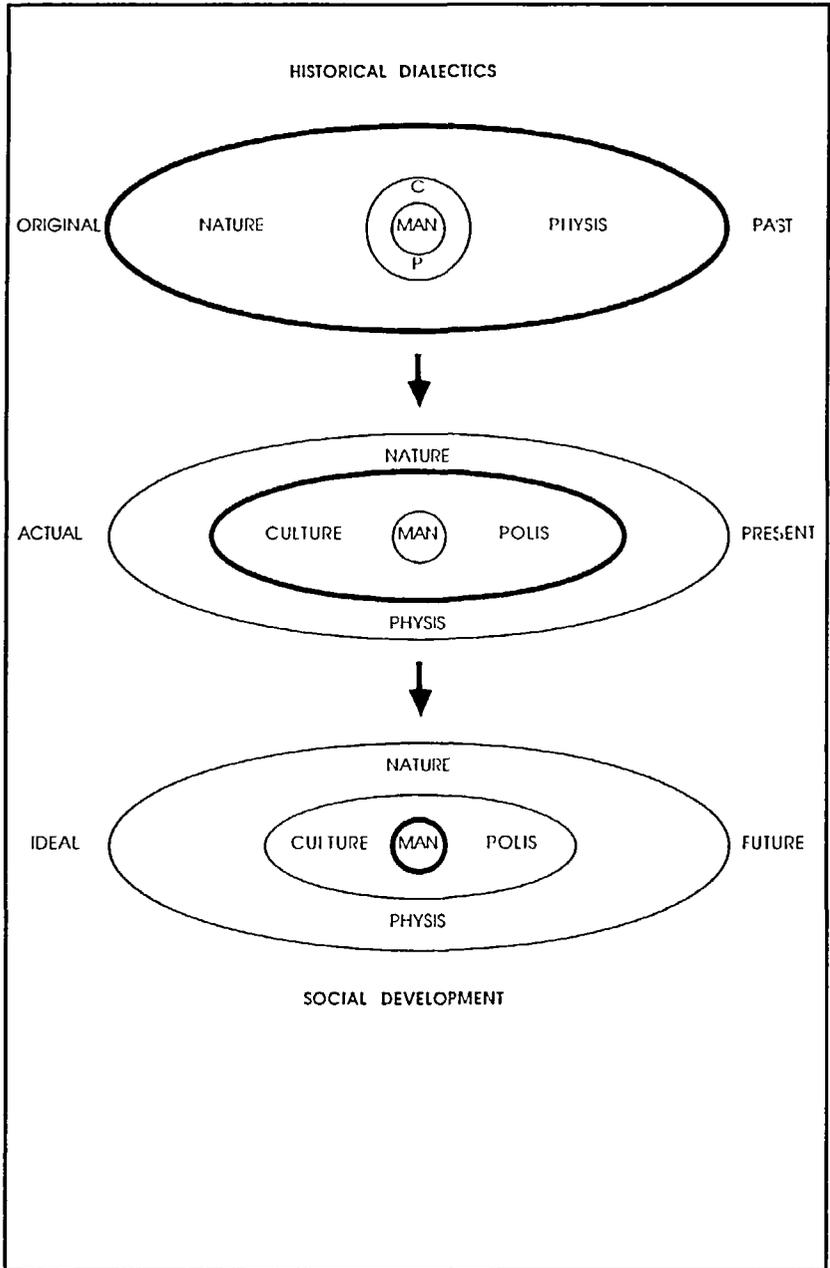
precedence over natural wellbeing. Only when there is sufficient time and space, can the wastes of the former be adequately absorbed and assimilated into the environment of the latter.

Given the indeterminacy of reality and imperfection of rationality, the momentous choices facing us should not be made easily or rapidly. In the absence of certainty as to the best policy, it is better to hedge our bets and spread the risk among the different options in an eclectic strategy. Such strategy seems to point towards a combination of private informal economics; participatory consensual politics; and a tolerant pluralistic culture.

Work in these sectors can best be carried out by the processes of: contributing exchange between north-western material-rationalism and south-eastern spiritual-mysticism; combining informal fusion of masculine force, strength and feminine soft, health; as well as consulting mutual originality, imagination, fertility of youth with the wisdom, prudence and constraint of maturity.

The emergent global order can only be sustainable if it is not exclusively anthropocentric, but places humanity in its natural context. Ultimately, human progress aims to transcend both its first (physical) and second (social) nature by attaining the third (spiritual) above and beyond them.

The Diagram in the next page summarises the above argument by showing three stages of social development. The first state depicts the original condition in which both man and society are still underdeveloped and dominated by nature. The second reflects the modern situation where cultural growth has made society dominant over both man and nature. If this situation continues, social hypertrophy threatens to belittle man and extinguish nature; unless a change of orientation directs us to the third condition. In it, we see an ideal equilibrium among the three components of the model. Given this alternative, we can draw the appropriate conclusions.



## Conclusion

Our working hypothesis has established a long-term correlation among natural evolution (independent parameter), social development (intervening factor), and human progress (dependent variable): ie.  $H=f(N,S)$ .



On that basis our initial thesis becomes that SD can only be sustained if it goes along with natural evolution and ecological preservation. Juxtaposed to the antithetical view that maximal human progress must emphasise economic growth by political freedom and individual responsibility, our final thesis may be synthesised as: sustainable development combining an interdependent coexistence among nature, culture and nurture.

This dialectical conclusion emphasises the necessity, as well as possibility and desirability of an equitable trilateral equilibrium, in which the harmonious interdependence of Man and Gaia is the *sine qua non* of sustainable SD.

Having demonstrated that collective development is incompatible with individual development, the only way to sustain social development without stunting personal growth and upsetting natural evolution is to restrict it within strict limits of tolerance and mutual respect. Such moral behaviour can itself be developed by the consciousness raising of ecopaedic education which makes humanity the trustee, not the master, of nature.

The argument here points towards a self-conscious self-reliance and self-control. This golden middle position transcends narrow-minded and short-sighted selfishness, without surrendering to collective mentality and mass culture. It combines enlightened self-interest with responsible community spirit; thus synthesising dialectically the collectivist thesis with its individualist antithesis.

This combination also extends personal ethics and social morals to embrace the whole ecosystem on whose continued existence we all

depend. As the cornerstone of ethics which is consideration of others, ecomorality takes into account not only intrahuman behaviour but interspecies relations. Peaceful coexistence among people is thus extended to mutual accommodation with the rest of nature, since we all live together or die alone.

What is important is to shed our anthropocentric arrogance and restrict the bounds of our technological capability while widening the extent of our collective liability in shaping the world. Humanity can certainly do with a greater measure of humility to replace its hubris whose wretched excess we must presently correct or perish.

### **Endnote**

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