

# Preface

I believe humanity is in the midst of a great transformation, moving out of the industrial era and into a new and fundamentally different era of human progress. This new post-industrial stage is yet to be given a permanent name. It is being ushered in by the sustainability movement, which includes sustainable development, sustainable living, sustainable agriculture, sustainable fisheries, sustainable forestry, and sustainable almost any other aspect of our economy or society. The basic principles of the sustainability movement are shared by advocates of environmentalism, energy conservation, and the prevention of global warming; of social justice, civil rights, and human rights; of non-violence, nuclear disarmament, and world peace; and of holistic medicine, holistic education, and spirituality.

The size of this new movement is generally underestimated, because the people in any one of these advocacy groups simply do not realize their basic principles are so widely shared with those in related movements. Those who need documentation of the emergence of this new culture in America might want to read *The Cultural Creatives, How 50 Million People Are Changing the World* by Paul Ray and Sherry Anderson.<sup>1</sup> I am convinced the sustainability movement now includes at least one-third of all North Americans and even greater proportions of Europeans and Asians, based on a variety of published sources and personal observations. It perhaps is as strong or stronger on other continents as well, but I simply don't have enough information to be sure. I am certain, however, that the movement continues to grow.

The great transformation is being driven by the growing realization that the neo-classical economic development paradigm, which currently dominates all industrial economies, quite simply is not sustainable over the long run. Paradigms are the mental models or frameworks we use to organize knowledge and information, develop plans and strategies, and to make and evaluate decisions. The industrial economic paradigm is very productive in the short run, but its productivity is supported by the extraction and exploitation of both the natural and human resources upon which its long run productivity inevitably depends. It is using up nature and it is using up society, and when these natural and human resources are gone, there will be no means of sustaining the economy. A growing number of people understand that to sustain civilized human life on earth, we must develop and implement a fundamentally new and different paradigm of economic development.

This great transformation will be accomplished through a new revolution – a period of rapid, and perhaps violent, societal change. Today we are in the midst of a revolution of new ideals – a battle for the hearts and minds of people. If we lose this peaceful revolution of ideals, humanity eventually will be confronted with a violent revolution among desperate people, when the earth's natural resources are no longer adequate to support its numbers and the earth's social resources are no longer adequate to find peaceful ways to allocate what little is left.

The new post-industrial era will require fundamentally different ways of thinking, choosing, organizing, and governing. It will require a different worldview – seeing the world as a complex, living ecosystem, rather than as a big, complex machine. It will require new and different paradigms for science, economics, and society. During such great transformations, the old paradigms are no longer relevant but the new ones are not yet fully developed. Our beliefs of what is real or imagined, true or false, right or wrong, and good or bad are a reflection of our worldviews and our mental paradigms. During great transformations, our means of reaching consensus is by relying on our common sense – our shared insights into what we know in our hearts to be real, true, right, and good. Our differing cultural and religious *values* tend to separate us but our common understanding of fundamental rightness and goodness hold us together. Our intelligent insight, our common sense, must provide the foundation of first principles upon which we can create a new science, a new economy, and a new society. During these times of economic, social, and ecological revolution, we have no choice but to return to our common sense.

Revolutions *begin* with recognition and understanding of the enemy, the villain, which today is the neoclassical economic paradigm of industrial development. However, revolutions are *won* by recognizing and understanding the new and better world to come, the vision, which is the new sustainable paradigm of economic, social, and ecological development. A growing number of people are beginning to understand that the old world is not sustainable. This is a necessary first step. Revolutions are sparked by the necessity for change, but revolutions are won by a commitment to a vision of something fundamentally better. I expect the name of the new era to reflect the new vision of the better world of the future, rather than the lack of sustainability in the world of today.

The new vision is rooted in a more enlightened concept of self-interest. The old self-interest is individualistic, materialistic, short run, and narrow. It's about how to get as much *stuff* as we can for ourselves right now, and trusting the invisible hand of free markets to transform our

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greed into good. The new self-interest is interpersonal, multidimensional, long run, and inclusive. It's about creating and maintaining relationships that will meet our physical, social, and spiritual needs; it's about making conscious, purposeful decisions to care about others and to care for the earth, as well as for ourselves. The new self-interest recognizes that it is not a sacrifice to care about other people or to care for the earth because these things add purpose, meaning, and happiness to our lives, right now. I have suggested it might be called the "age of insight," as we will have moved beyond logic and reason, by utilizing our uniquely human capacity for intelligent insight. The name doesn't matter, the new vision does.

Finally, revolutions are won by people of hope. Hope doesn't mean that we believe the victory will be easy or quick, or even that the odds are in our favor. Hope instead means that we know what we are pursuing is fundamentally right and good and that victory is possible. Hope is contagious; it spreads from one hopeful person to another, until it explodes into an epidemic of hope, which provides the revolution with the energy it ultimately needs for victory. I don't know whether or not this revolution will be won, but I know that the vision we are pursuing is not only necessary for the future of humanity, but perhaps more important, it is right and good. It makes common sense.

We were put on this earth not only to take care of ourselves, but also to take care of the earth, and to care about each other. Carrying out our purpose in life is the only thing that gives true quality to our life - that makes us truly happy. We will not find true happiness and quality in our lives until we find the courage to return to our common sense and to win the new social, economic, and spiritual revolution.

**Endnote**

- <sup>1</sup> Paul Ray and Sherry Anderson, *The Cultural Creatives: How 50 Million People are Changing the World* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2000).