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Creating Ecosophical Change?

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It is evident that with many of the biological and abiological systems of Gaia under varying degrees of stress that we cannot continue with the technocratic mindscapes that have come to dominate political and economic thinking. However, there are problems with promoting change. Systems such as economic and political ones are chaotic, just as are biological and social systems. Herein lies the dilemma. Chaotic systems are not amenable to directional change. Thus while we can force change, we cannot determine any final outcomes (Prigogine & Stengers, 1984).

With this in mind I wish to explore two sets of seemingly incommensurable ideas in an attempt to stimulate thinking about the wisdom of forcing change from technocratic mindscapes.

Drengson (1992) has well described the Platform Principles of the Deep Ecology Movement. These eight Principles delineate mindscapes for deep ecological thinking and practice. Anyone who espouses these principles realizes that their widespread acceptance and implementation will inevitably lead to massive and radical re-structuring of all modern societies. In particular current Economic/Political/Corporate structures (EPCs) will evolve into structures that would be, perhaps unrecognizable from our current perspective. I will present some theoretical perspectives that may allow Deep Ecology Movement followers to support this evolution by contrasting the *Platform Principles* with Mander's *Eleven Rules of Corporate Behavior*. This contrast will provide points of discussion or action for social/cultural change.

Mander's 11 Rules Of Corporate Behavior

Mander (1991) examines the impacts of technology on quality of life in Post-modern society. He argues that modern EPC structures based on current models of capitalism have disenfranchised most citizens. He accuses EPCs of following agendas that are often inimical to individual, family, community and regional life. Mander developed the following "11 Rules of Corporate Behaviour" to explain the often unfeeling response of corporations to environmental damage (e.g. deforestation, Exxon Valdez), individual health (e.g. Johns Manville and asbestosis, the Dalkon Shield) and community health (e.g. Love Canal).

1. The Profit Imperative. "[P]rofit is the ultimate measure of all corporate decisions. It takes precedence over community well-being, worker health, public health, peace, environmental preservation, or national security."

2. The Growth Imperative. "Corporations live or die by whether they can sustain growth. On this depends relationships to investors, to the stock market, to banks, and to the public perception. The growth imperative also fuels the corporate desire to find and develop scarce resources in obscure parts of the world."

3. Competition & Aggression. "On the one hand, corporations require a high degree of cooperation within management. On the other hand, they place every person in management in fierce competition with each other. ... Corporate (or athletic) ideology holds that competition improves worker incentive and corporate performance, and therefore benefits society. Our society has accepted this premise utterly. Unfortunately, however, it also surfaces in personal relationships. Living by standards of competition and aggression on the job, human beings have few avenues to express softer, more personal feelings. ... such contrary standards on the job and at home can lead to a kind of schizophrenia that often plays out in busted relationships."

4. Amorality. "Not being human, not having feelings, corporations do not have morals or altruistic goals. So decisions that may be antithetical to community goals or environmental health are made without suffering misgivings. In fact, corporate executives praise 'nonemotionality' as a basis for 'objective' decisions. ... when corporations say 'we care', it is almost always in response to the widespread perception that they do not care. And they don't. How could they? Corporations do not have feelings or morals. All acts are in the service of profit."

5. Hierarchy. "Corporate law requires that corporations be structured into classes of superiors and subordinates within a centralized pyramidal structure: chairman, directors, CEO, vice presidents, division managers, and so on. The efficiency of this hierarchical form, which also characterizes the military, the government, and most institutions in our society, is rarely questioned. ... That effective, non-hierarchical modes of organization exist on the planet, and have been successful for millennia, is barely known by most Americans."

6. Quantification, Linearity & Segmentation. "Corporations require that subjective information be translated into objective form, i.e. numbers. This excludes from the decision-making process all values that do not so translate. The subjective or spiritual aspects of forests, for example, cannot be translated, and so do not enter corporate equations. ... When corporations are asked to clean up their smokestack emissions, they lobby to relax the new standard, to contain costs. The result is that a predictable number of people are expected to become sick and die. The operative corporate standard is not 'as safe as humanly possible' but rather, 'as safe as possible commensurate with maintaining acceptable profit'."

7. Dehumanization. "If the environment and the community are objectified by corporations, with all decisions measured against public relations or profit standards, so is the employee objectified and dehumanized. Corporations make

a conscious effort to depersonalize. ... In the great majority of corporations, employees are viewed as ciphers, as cogs in the wheel, replaceable by others or by machines.”

8. Exploitation. ”All corporate profit is obtained by a simple formula: Profit equals the difference between the amount paid to an employee and the economic value of the employee’s output, and/or the difference between the amount paid for raw materials used in production (including costs of processing) and the ultimate sales price of the processed raw materials. Karl Marx was right: a worker is not compensated for the full value of his or her labour; neither is the raw material supplier. The owners of capital skim off part of the value as profit. Profit is based on underpayment. ... Profit is based on paying less than actual value for workers and resources. This is called exploitation.”

9. Ephemerality. ”Corporations exist beyond time and space. .. they are legal creations that exist only on paper. They do not die a natural death; they outlive their creators. And they have no commitment to locale, employees, or neighbours. This makes the modern corporation entirely different from the baker or grocer of previous years who survived by cultivating intimacy with the neighbors. ... The traditional ideal of community engagement is antithetical to corporate behavior.”

10. Opposition to Nature. ”Though individuals who work for corporations may personally love nature, corporations themselves, and corporate societies, are intrinsically committed to intervening in, altering, and transforming nature. ... all manufacturing depends upon intervention and reorganization of nature.”

11. Homogenization. ”American rhetoric claims that commodity society delivers greater choice and diversity than other societies. ‘Choice’ in this context means *product* choice, choice in the marketplace: many brands to chose from, and diverse features on otherwise identical products. Actually, however, corporations have a stake in all of us living our lives in a similar manner, achieving our pleasures from things that we buy. While it is true that different corporations seek different segments of the market - elderly people, let’s say, or organic food buyers - *all* corporations share an identical economic, cultural, and social vision, and seek to accelerate society’s (and individual) acceptance of that vision. ... Lifestyles and economic systems that emphasize sharing commodities and work, that do not encourage commodity accumulation, or that celebrate nonmaterial values, are not good for business. In *Trilateralism*, editor Holly Sklar quotes the president of the Nabisco Corporation: ‘one world of homogeneous consumption ... [I am] looking forward to the day when Arabs and Americans, Latins and Scandinavians will be munching Ritz crackers as enthusiastically as they already drink Coke or brush their teeth with Colgate.’” **

Ecosophical Implications of Mander's Rules

- I believe that the implementation of the Eight Platform Principles is not possible within current EPCs. The nature of social structures is such that they are highly resistant to change (Caley & Sawada, 1994). They are especially resistant to incompatible ideas. This is apparent whenever we engage in or observe political dialogues. Those "in power" always take their examples of change from past events. They implicitly assume that the future will closely resemble the past (linear thinking).
- The Platform Principles are quite explicit in their demand for radical change. Here, I contrast the Platform Principles with Mander's Rules:
- Principle 1 espouses the concept of *intrinsic value* of both human and non-human life. Intrinsic value is a subjective value which, under Rule 6, is not quantifiable. EPCs cannot allow arguments of intrinsic value to influence decision-making.
- Principle 2 affirms the intrinsic value of the richness and diversity of all life forms. Corporations seek and require homogeneity as described in Mander's Rule 11.
- Principle 3 denies the right of humans to reduce richness and diversity. Rules 10 & 11 show that corporations *must* reduce diversity in order to increase profit and maintain growth.
- Principle 4 calls for "a substantial decrease in the human population". Rule 1 shows that corporations are based on continuous growth and consumption.
- Principle 5 calls to question the increasing interference of humans in the nonhuman world. Rules 1, 5, 6, 8, 10, & 11 demand maximum corporate interference in order to maximize profit.
- Principle 6 calls for fundamental changes in policies that effect basic economic, technological and ideological structures. All of the Rules indicate that corporations will fiercely resist such changes. Rules 3, 4, & 7 suggest that any and all means of resistance will be considered reasonable. [Remember the bombing of the Rainbow Warrior!]
- Principle 7 indicates that *quality of living* takes precedence over *standard of living*. This would be a direct threat to corporate profits.
- Principle 8 calls for action by those who accept the foregoing 7 Principles. Mander's analysis suggests that those who take action will be in danger of physical, economic, political and psychological assault.

Major barriers to the acceptance of the Platform Principles then are the inherent inertia of social systems (resistance to change) and the current mindscapes of corporate systems.

As Deep Ecology Movement followers we are left with certain possible paths. First, we can allow the current EPC mindscape to play itself out against the biological backdrop of Gaia. Certainly, many biological and abiological systems will be dramatically changed and many more species will become extinct. Second, we can take stands and force issues with dominant EPCs. This means being very unpopular in present times of technological change when employment is uncertain at best. Third, we can take a Prigoginian view and work towards continually stressing socio-political systems with a view to forcing them to far-from-equilibrium situations. Presumably, they will spontaneously bifurcate into new more efficient and stable systems. However, the "danger" with this approach is that we have no control over the re-structuring.

The astute reader will likely consider this list of possible paths to be insufficient. However, my purpose here is to stimulate thinking and discussion about socio-political change within the framework provided. I make no pretence about my ability to influence socio-political change.

Note

** Kohn (1986) disputes the commonly held myth that competition leads to excellence and improved performance. Kohn cites evidence from athletic and psychological studies that show that peak performance is hardly ever achieved under stressful conditions. Athletic records are almost always exceeded in practice, long before they are broken in competition.

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