



The Avatars of Sustainability: A Necessary Prolegomenon

1.1 WHY LOOKING BACK TO THE FOUNDERS?

Why is it necessary to employ the founders' support for a better, fairer and simpler understanding of sustainable development? Various reasons are discussed in the following paragraphs.

First of all, their framework for analysis is clear, logical and well-articulated. The division of labour and human cooperation gives substance to this framework, and through them, almost everything is explained: exchange, money, equilibrium and social harmony. The reality of the classical founders' world is a contradictory one, socially and economically. Their economic and social harmony is dynamic, with rich and poor changing places, efficiently or otherwise, depending on how they use their minds and hands. Good practices (Smithian institutions) respected by economic actors, the government in particular, provide support for understanding the seeds of economic resilience. This resilience is sustained by a small but powerful government, with a job description in accordance with the conception of Smith and Bastiat, summed up under two main headings: freedom and security. The role of domestic education as a natural institution regarded by Smith as a creative activity and the role of profit and productive work in sustaining economic dynamics, all with support in private ownership, reject any contemporary approach that would pursue sustainability beyond the free market economy. Classical economists tell us

that profit moves the world, but wealth is gained through work and within the boundaries of such a framework. Work concerns all those who have the capacity to engage in it. This is how growth is achieved, and its rationale, through development, is to make people happy—not equally nor through statistical manipulation. With reference to such a background, it is possible to understand why degrowth is not suitable for everybody, through both message and reasoning; and how distributive justice and impersonal efficiency are as attractive as they are non-engaging.

Following a natural process with impeccable logic: production–distribution–exchange–consumption, the classicists help us understand why their GDP has consistency. Unlike the contemporary one, the concept is not full of holes, filled with nominal bubbles due to the fact that the causal relationship between the main components of reproduction has been reversed. In such a context, it is possible to prove that proclaiming the primacy of distribution and redistributive justice in relation to production is a naive, if not an absurd conclusion. For the same reasons, one can find proof of the lack of logical support within reports such as the Stiglitz-Sen-Fitoussi one (Stiglitz et al. 2009). We will rely on the founders’ analyses to reveal how the nominal economy may be illusory, if both the lesson of Smith’s alleged dogma (Marx 1990) and the lesson of Ricardo’s (2001) and Marx’s (1990) one about money are omitted.

Development for the benefit of all and with respect to nature can be targeted and implemented through a socialist or liberal policy, or a mixed one. Regardless of which research methodology is used, including a counterfactual one, a brief but objective analysis of the history of economic and social dynamics, as it has emerged from the classicists, tells us one certain thing: welfare and civility, including respect for the environment, are found in the countries that have followed Smith. At the same time, the social and environmental elements call for the consistent presence of the state, effecting concrete policies. Not, however, a Leviathan state in communist clothes, but a responsible state, the main actor in an institutional arrangement that makes possible human coexistence and cooperation. When asked how much state and how much market, how much liberalism and how much protectionism, how the logic of profit gets along with social welfare or how much macro-management must be given to the state, classical texts remain the source for qualified answers. If their recipe is sometimes seen as the ideal, at least, it shows us the direction to follow. For example, the role of free competition within the framework of well-considered laws, in satisfying both

personal and general interests, remains the one that Adam Smith (1977) and Frédéric Bastiat (2007) supported. The XVIIIth passage of Bastiat's *Economic Sophisms* alone, "There are No Absolute Principles", is sufficient to understand how the mechanism whereby private initiative and freedom of exchange, guided by the invisible hand and personal interest, are infinitely more effective in satisfying everybody than any arbitrary government intervention. Similarly, it becomes embarrassing to seek protectionist arguments after reading the famous writing "Petition of the Manufacturers of Candles, Waxlights, Lamps, Candlelights, Street Lamps, Snuffers, Extinguishers, and the Producers of Oil, Tallow, Resin, Alcohol, and, Generally, of Everything Connected with Lighting"—by the same classical author. A simple reading of Marx's "Fragment on Machines" and of Ricardo's chapter "On Machinery" might have calmed the atmosphere at the Davos meeting in 2016. It might have clarified for the participants that the fourth industrial revolution is not necessarily destined to fill the world with high-skilled unemployed. But do we still have time for them? How many scholars still waste their time reading Ricardo to the end to understand that "machinery cannot be worked without the assistance of men, it cannot be made but with the contribution of their labour" (Ricardo 2001, p. 290) and that the law of competitive advantage could be theoretically invalidated but, in practice, it sustains the positive-sum game of free international trade.

On the trail of classical thinking, we can set out certain assumptions and suggestions that may be less comfortable but are not non-scientific or unnecessary truths. With truths established, a priori, one remains within orthodox analysis. This is not our intention. Rather, we think that the natural division of labour and inequality, not only at the starting point but also during the process, can be realistic working hypotheses. Both economic geography and economic history will be exploited to consider what responsibility may look like for future generations, in an increasingly globalized world. What does it mean, and how and for whom can redistributive justice act in order to materialize the messages of Piketty, Hayek, Mill, Tinbergen, Sachs, etc. Significant migration makes the relationship between generations transient, as it is observed in the Brundtland Report, because of the substantial number of children and grandchildren living in a country other than the one of their grandparents. If we allow distributive justice to become a sensitive topic, how will it be perceived by the world, and how will it fit, if at all, with Smith's comments on "the unfortunate law of slavery" (Smith 1977, p. 775) or "very little honour

to the policy of Europe” (Smith 1977, p. 778)? How can these topics be tackled when it comes to the lack of development in a good part of the world to which today’s developed nations have a “moral obligation”, to use Brundtland’s phrase (World Commission on Environment and Development 1987, p. 52). Will we rediscover the poor of the world to squeeze out their surplus savings or allow them to find their way unhindered? At the same time, how do we deal with the chorus of camouflaged futurists who advise them to industrialize more slowly and focus on more traditional activities (Martin 2007)? Instead of advising the underdeveloped to look at the rich countries in a demoralizing mirror (Marx 1990), we should suggest that systematic and tenacious work is the way to achieve sustainable development. Max Weber (2005) would prove to be a good teacher in this endeavour.

We will also refer to the founding tenets of economics to show that the dynamics of accumulation through reinvestment of profits ensures employment and economic equilibrium as well as social peace. Also, through the founders, we find that the concept of decrease is essentially pre-modern, inspired by the obsolete idea of the uselessness of reinvesting the surplus and the illusion, as a consequence, of ostentatious consumption. In other words, we can understand through the founders that accumulating profits and reinvesting them are the main determinants of growth. This is the way to be wealthy and happy. Mill’s “Socrates dissatisfied” (Mill 2015, p. 124) is a transitory episode only to the extent that waste and consumer ostentation tend to define ranks, rather than following rational precepts. It remains to be seen whether we need to revisit the Brundtland Report to learn about the relationship between the rich and the poor, when we already know from Adam Smith that things will always be like this. Although differences will always exist, absolute poverty is ugly and inhumane, and all energies must be gathered against it. Furthermore, a fact that cannot be ignored is that many poor of the rich world are today richer than the rich of the poor world, and relative poverty is the measure we should consider when we try to validate economic principles.

It is important to look back also because from the classical economists we understand not only that the object of economic science is economic growth, but also that a civilized society is sustained through the presence of and respect for rules. Any deviation from these principles runs counter to the theory of development and to reality itself. This topic is one of the most generous places to be exploited. This is because instead of focusing

on meaningful themes, especially the theory of growth, there is a process of dilution and digression to areas that do not belong to economics. This is done by disregarding ideas from economics and by considering areas only loosely linked to it. It should be noted that an extraordinary number of books and articles dealing with growth make no reference to classical economics. And it is highly damaging when renowned, opinion-forming minds fall into this trap. If not even well-known economists build on solid foundations, it is not difficult to understand how the theory of sustainable development has been filled with an extravaganza of words and why it entertains the possibility of living better without working more, or why proclaiming propagandistically “Down with growth!” paves the way to scientific glory. On this line of thought, is it not significant that the Stiglitz-Sen-Fitoussi Commission was created in 2008, precisely the year when the world economy began to crack? To crack not in relation to distribution or the environment but rather in regard to its hard core: the link between the natural rate of interest and the bank rate; and in regard to an inflated monetary dimension fuelled by breaking some elementary classical rules regarding the role and functions of money. Yet, it is precisely the two aforementioned dimensions, of environment and distribution, on which the Commission has focused.

In Romanian philosophy, there is a belief that, in each country, the sky is different. Paraphrasing, we could say that each country experiences the joy of possessing a part of the world’s sky in a unique way, a joy that you build yourself, a distinct part of the joy of the world. The World Bank can make calculations of the globalized world GDP, but they are not relevant to individual well-being in Somalia or Switzerland. Individual well-being is a result of how each person uses, efficiently or not, his/her mind and hands in an environment of competition restricted only by law. To wait for a share of the welfare of an increasingly globalized world to also flow towards you only because you are part of it is akin to Campanella’s *Sun City* or More’s *Utopia*. Individualism, and not holism, as a principle of judgement, remains the distinctive feature of constructing and acceding to welfare. Here, again, the founders tell us which is the best alternative. If Adam Smith and his disciple on this topic, Hayek, reviewed the state of the world, they would certainly appreciate the individual efforts of the Dutch to fill their country with dams in order to drain and reclaim as much land as possible from the sea. They would also see that the Sahara is asking for solar panels. But that it also requires individual initiative to bring about transformation.

1.2 SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: EVERYTHING AND NOTHING

Never in the area of development theory has a word carried more meanings, evoked more comments and accrued so many different adjectives. We are talking about sustainable, or durable, or resilient development.

Although the phenomena of economic growth and development were present well before 1987, this is the moment when, through the Brundtland Report, a milestone is reached that transforms sustainable development into a leitmotif of economic and political discourse. The post-factum comments of this event have institutionalized the idea that the essential product of the Report translates into a standard definition. Thus, “Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (World Commission on Environment and Development 1987, p. 41).

To define is to capture, in a sentence, the essence of a phenomenon. After defining it, by an abstract and easy-to-remember sentence, a complex phenomenon may be further elaborated through secondary sentences to detail its intimate structure, function or mechanism. This is not the case with development, no matter which metaphor we use—sustainable, durable, resilient, etc. Economic growth, which, through economic and social progress, affects development, is a concept that economic theory has long since clarified, without doubt and without relativisms. The Brundtland Report uses the notion of “sustainability”, without stating clearly that it is a definition. Our opinion is that the authors of *Our Common Future* (World Commission on Environment and Development 1987) did not delineate a standard definition, but rather the exegetes who have followed. What the Report’s authors wanted to convey to the whole world was a *message* with a strong humanitarian flavour, expressed with a triple concern for the fate of those that follow, pursuing the following aims: the use of non-renewable resources without waste; everyone benefits from growth; increased growth occurs without pollution, flattening Kuznets’ curve as much as possible. Nothing is unclear, but rather the message is engaging and inspirational. If scientists had taken this meaning from the Report, we would not have reached today’s situation where sustainable development means everything and nothing. Rather, the mundane and undistorted notion would have retained its primary and original meaning of rational consumption

of resources and energies. However, to create a sense of false thoroughness, some scientists felt the need to encapsulate the words of the Report in an alleged definition. And, in a conflicting etymological area, a definition evokes comments, criticism, denials or appreciations, depending on one's theoretical-doctrinal perspective and the socio-professional category of the analyst. In the area of economic science, there are other areas of "great oppositions" that undermine its status and suggest weak causalities (Mouchot 2003). On the theme of growth and development, it should be strong, edifying and clear. But it is not due to digressions on the topic of sustainability.

We are already aware of the direction of our analysis and we are convinced that an inventory of the pros and cons of sustainability, impossible to fit between the covers of one book, does not affect our conclusions. However, we offer a sample of guidelines in order to argue, once more, that returning to healthy founding origins is necessary for clarification and simplification.

Thus:

- In terms of the Brundtland Report, the wording admits the relative: "sustainable development is not a fixed state of harmony, but rather a process of change in which the exploitation of resources, the direction of investments, the orientation of technological development, and institutional change are made consistent with future as well as present needs" (World Commission on Environment and Development 1987, p. 17).
- The multidimensionality of the phenomenon, the fact that it comprises, simultaneously, the economic, social and environmental dimensions, makes it hard to capture it within a single equation (Gatto 1995; Goodland 1995; Shearman 1990). From here originates the attempts to define the phenomenon by dividing it into individual components.
- The economic-social-environmental triumvirate should come together to provide the true meaning of sustainability. Unfortunately, Jeffrey Sachs (2012) notes, the three desirables have not yet been reconciled as an organic whole.
- The distinction between economic sustainability and environmental sustainability is observed by the Commission of Stiglitz-Sen-Fitoussi Report. The first is to be analysed by means of monetary indicators

and the second by a well-chosen set of physical indicators (Stiglitz et al. 2009).

- Robert Kates considers that pointing the concept towards social concerns was a meritorious course of action by the Brundtland Commission. A new perspective on nature would enhance the chance that, steered in such direction, the concept would remain alive, divided between its three main components: “The original emphasis on economic development and environmental protection has been broadened and deepened to include alternative notions of development (human and social) and alternative views of nature (anthropocentric versus eco-centric). Thus, the concept maintains a creative tension between a few core principles and an openness to reinterpretation and adaptation to different social and ecological contexts” (Kates et al. 2005, p. 20).
- “The moral obligation for the future” is uncertain and, as such, hardly feasible, believes Robert Solow: “Pretty clearly the notion of sustainability is about our obligation to the future. It says something about a moral obligation that we supposed to have for future generations. I think it is very important to keep in mind [...] that you can’t be morally obliged to something that is not feasible” (Solow 2005, p. 1002). A general and non-specific obligation, the author adds, aims at preserving the *ability to produce* and live longer and better: “Sustainability as a moral obligation is a general obligation not a specific one. It is not an obligation to preserve this or preserve that. It is an obligation, if you want to make sense out of it, to preserve the capacity to be well off, to be as well off as we” (Solow 2005, pp. 1008–1009).
- It is clear that “The moral obligation underlying sustainability is an injunction to preserve the capacity for future people to be as well off as we are” (Anand and Sen 2000, p. 2038). At the same time, we must not forget that the problem is also an intra-generational one; that we have serious problems with poverty today; and that “It would be a gross violation of the universalist principle if we were to be obsessed about inter-generational equity without at the same time seizing the problem of intra-generational equity: the ethic of universalism certainly demands such impartiality” (Anand and Sen 2000, p. 2038).
- The predilection of political decision-makers to adorn their speeches with fashionable words does not leave the concept untouched. In this respect, Pelt et al. (1995), Morelli (2011), and Johnston et al.

(2007) emphasize that, through the language of political decision-makers and corporate leaders, sustainable development has become a slogan. Sharachchandra Lélé argues that sustainable development “is in real danger of becoming a cliché like appropriate technology—a fashionable phrase that everyone pays homage to but nobody cares to define” (Sharachchandra 1991, p. 607). The same parallel between sustainable development and appropriate technology is observed by Desta Mebratu (1998).

- Abstract and inconsistent, the concept would benefit from a consensus in approach precisely because of its lack of concreteness. Baden says “The expression ‘sustainable development’ is a magic formula, linked to emotions but without any concrete contents nor exact definition. And precisely thanks to that, it carries a broad consensus. Its attractive power lies in the impressions and the emotions linked to it, and not in the concrete contributions from a deep analysis” (Baden 1997, p. 2). Obligatory but also absurd, sustainable development is a term that Luc Ferry finds to be “more charming than meaningful” (Ferry 2007, p. 76).
- For Franck-Dominique Vivien, sustainable development has become “a central element of the rhetoric” with an “incontestable fashion effect” (Vivien 2003, p. 1), whether it belongs to economic journals, press or advertising. Even more critical, Alban Verchère (2011) believes that sustainable development is a trick to deceive the Third World, a naive concept that ignores the issue of power. The same ambivalence is expressed by Peter Söderbaum: “One attractive (or dubious) feature of the term is that each scholar, or other actor, can choose a meaning of sustainability which fits well into his or her pre-established world view” (Söderbaum 1992, p. 137).
- The view that sustainable development is a truism is supported by Michael Redclift (1987, 2005) with titles such as *Sustainable Development: Exploring the Contradictions*, or *Sustainable development (1987–2005): an oxymoron comes of age*.
- Following the evolution process, sustainability seems to be a link in the chain: viable, sustainable, durable, resilient (Lefèvre 2015). It only seems so, however, because the author immediately mentions that the above notions are undifferentiated synonyms, all subordinated to economic reasons. To this latter fact, he attributes not only the economic and social crisis, but also the crisis of civilisation as a whole. An ecological transition would solve the problem. Samuel

Huntington (2011) has been deprived of its subject. It seems that the *Clash of Civilizations* happens in a completely different place!

- Sustainability can be weak or strong. The first type is based on the neoclassical hypothesis that technology can substitute nature as a production factor. Eminent contributions on this matter are brought by Dasgupta and Heal (1974), Stiglitz (1974), Solow (1974), and Hartwick (1977). The second type takes into account that nature cannot be substituted indefinitely due to technical impossibilities, but also simply because it is finite, exhaustible (Daly 1990; Costanza 1991; Norgaard 1994). The solution would be the subordination of the economy to ecology in the structure of a new science, ecological economics, based on the principle of strong sustainability. It would differ from environmental economics simply because, according to the concept of ecological economics, “nature is not soluble in the market” (Fröger et al. 2016, p. 8).
- Richard Norgaard (1994) and Herman Daly (1990) believe that the solution to the contradictions between the financial management of resources, subject to the constraints of capitalist accumulation, and ecological management can be found in the logic of sustainable development, as understood in terms of the co-evolution of social and natural dynamics. This is a central theme of ecological economics, of which the two are supportive.
- For Debal Deb, capitalism is the most inappropriate way to pursue sustainable development. The logic of profit and the mechanism of perpetual growth do not recommend it as a suitable system for sustainability. The author’s solution is predictable: “zero-growth economy will result in better environmental integrity because with zero rates of profit and interest, there will be no further incentive to invest in technology to accelerate depletion of natural resources. Zero rate of profit may not need stopping of all business enterprises; rather, enterprises will strive to maintain the average rate of profit, which is zero, and avoid *negative* rates of profit” (Deb 2009, p. 293). This would be possible in an “inclusive freedom of society”, believes the author. Sudhir Anand and Amartya Sen also have a problem with the market and its mechanisms based on the logic of profit. They do not believe in its ability to solve a problem that belongs to the future. Therefore, they call for the state’s presence: “the obligation of sustainability cannot be left entirely to the market. The future is not adequately represented in the market – at least not the distant future – and there is no reason that ordinary market behavior will

take care of whatever obligation we have to the future. Universalism demands that the state should serve as a trustee for the interests of future generations” (Anand and Sen 2000, p. 2034).

- The existence of strong and effective institutions, including the presence of democracy, can make the difference between sustainability and non-sustainability in the opinion of many authors (Barro 1996; Broadberry and Wallis 2017; North 1990, 2005; Stiglitz 2016). Within this approach, Acemoglu and Robinson maintain the inclusive role of political and economic institutions to make the difference between “inclusive” and “extractive” nations (Acemoglu and Robinson 2012).
- It is the production of material and non-material goods that generates growth. The neglect of this aspect is synonymous with the trivialisation of the concept of development, believes Amartya Sen. He states that “The process of economic development cannot abstract from expanding the supply of food, clothing, housing, medical services, educational facilities, etc. and from transforming the productive structure of the economy, and these important and crucial changes are undoubtedly matters of economic growth” (Sen 1988, p. 12). Sen continues “The foundational role of values can be neglected in favor of an instrumental view only by trivializing the basis of the concept of development” (Sen, 1988, p. 23).
- The Stiglitz-Sen-Fitoussi Report’s (2009) synthesis mentions the “sustainability of well-being”. In response, the Report of the Conseil d’Analyse Économique and German Council of Economic Experts (2010) points out that, indeed, GDP is not an absolute measure of well-being, but, nonetheless, the material component prevalent in the calculation of GDP is essential if well-being is to be achieved and delivered to the population.
- “The problem with sustainable development”, believes Serge Latouche, “has not so much to do with the word sustainable, a beautiful expression, but with the concept of development that is downright a ‘toxic word’” (Latouche 2007).

What does this “conflict of definitions” tell us, to use the expression of Jacques Sapir from his book *Quelle économie pour le XXIe siècle?* (Sapir 2005)? Sapir uses an inventory of the multitude of definitions of Economic Science created by Serge Latouche. Yet, ironically, it is precisely Latouche who makes use of titles such as *L’imposture du développement durable ou les habits neufs du développement* (Latouche 2003) and *A bas*

le développement durable! Vive la décroissance conviviale! (Latouche 2007) to create disorientation and confusion, tarnishing the image of the science he claims to serve.

So, what do these many and contradictory definitions tell us?

Firstly, the state of amalgamation is clear and bothersome. The attempts to define, critique, classify and configure the content of sustainability are diverse. The criteria for analysis and the units of measurement vary widely.

One common observation is that the phenomenon is too complex and can only be analysed through one of the three components. The triptych of sustainable development calls for economic, social and environmental judgements. Yet, only the ecological footprint appears to define the scope of sustainability.

When not associated with its usual characteristics of durability and resilience, sustainability is linked to adjectives not usually found within the scope of economic analysis: magical, vague, dangerous, similar to the Christian vision of good and evil, obligatory, absurd, etc. When trying to emphasize the link between the definition and the essence of the phenomenon, sustainability appears as an oxymoron, a contradiction of terms. If it refers to the extent to which the main factors of production substitute each other, sustainability appears to be either weak or strong. If one is to take into account the macro-organizational framework to which sustainability is applied, then it could be conceived as: (a) a new model: democratic, concerned with social distribution and equity but opposed to capitalist economism; (b) an “inclusive freedom of society” with a zero profit rate (Deb 2009); (c) a hidden form of protectionism or a trick to deceive the Third World; and (d) a compromise solution between capitalism and socialism or a naive construction that ignores issues of power. The fact that sustainability has passed from the minds of scientists into everyday language is captured by expressions such as slogan, cliché and an element of rhetoric. That sustainability no longer possesses any serious meaning, we understand from Solow’s admonishment: the less we know about it, the better it is for the health of our thoughts.

In summary, the sustainability of economic development can mean anything. It can be viewed and analysed from all angles and makes sense only by the intent and interest of the one who leans on the concept.

Secondly, it is said that the definitions stem from an alleged standard belonging to the Brundtland Report, or, the Report, as we have already

stated, does not provide one. It explains a *necessary process* of compromise, reconciliation and balance of contradictory tendencies manifested between the three sectors of sustainability: economy, society and environment. The *goal* of this compromise is to make the lives of present and future generations compatible. All of the various definitions would have gained substance and would have been easy to comprehend, had they been connected to the core, namely economic growth. In looking for its ultimate purpose, the Report introduced the notion of sustainability within its analysis to clearly state something that can be found in the *message of the founders*: that the fruits of growth must be enjoyed by men and other living beings and that this happens in friendship with nature and not at its expense. Further, this exercise should be seeking permanence, to be valid today but also in the future. Yet, many of the definitions mentioned not only do not comply with continued growth, but they deny it, deeming it toxic and contrary to happiness—hence the need to stop and switch to degrowth. In such circumstances, do we still find ourselves within the area of economic science if we relativize its main goal up to the point of denying it completely? If all those who study the subject, economists and non-economists alike, miss what has been established plain and crystal clear by Adam Smith, and instead come up with their own definition, the notional and epistemological base of economics will be seriously damaged. It should be added that not even Smith (1977) managed to come up with a standard definition. He defined the *goal* by letting a civilized society (the leitmotif of many paragraphs of his writing) understand that: (1) the results of human action are not to be thrown into the sea or incinerated; (2) these results must profit those who create and expect them; (3) the productive activity provides employment and purchasing power; and (4) at last, in a civilized world, no garbage is thrown on the side of the road, the sky is not covered by the smoke of the factories, animals are not aggressed, and forests are not cut down. Is it necessary to come up with hundreds of additional definitions—to pollute the medium of ideas with things already known?

Thirdly, it is acceptable that economics was not, and is not, the exclusive domain of economists. Favourable circumstances have located its origins in the spheres of philosophy, history, sociology and psychology. But that phase has passed, and economics has been formalized with an object and method of its own. It remains open, by the very nature of its object, to interdisciplinary study. Economic facts are embedded in real

life; you cannot de-compact it and understand it only by economic knowledge. But there is a long road from here to the invasion, not just of “polylogism” (Mises 1998), but also of logical inadequacies, fictions, phantasms or naiveties. If those seduced by the economic mirage would come up with a solid theoretical offering, within the limit of paradigm shifts, we would be more than happy to recognize it. But what do you do with those who fill the area of economics with distortions, confusions and inadequacies? It is a curious attitude when one tries to forbid a smile caused by economic growth, proclaiming its end and rejecting it without solid arguments. It is also illusory to proclaim that we could live better with less work, insisting on the pleasure component and disregarding the material side of life (Daly 1974). In this respect, the rarely quoted work of Thorstein Veblen (2007) and his “leisure class” appears to be overlooked. The insights of the old institutionalist captured a change, observable but illogical, of plans: the transformation of work from simply a means to an end in itself. The goal is the pleasure of life. No one likes work in itself, but without it one does not reach that goal. For the time being, mankind has not invented another way to obtain extra well-being. This is Veblen’s message.

As a reflection of the detachment from the classical ideological core, we find ourselves today in the hands of manipulators of ideas, invited to think that what happened in the USSR immediately post-war bore the signs of growth and even of sustainable development. The Brundtland spirit asks for disclosure. We cannot teach future generations that they will progress at the desired pace by putting the cart before the horse, distribution before production. Do we advise them to read Lenin to see how a scientific plan of imposed collectivization of agriculture and forced industrialization promises to deliver a good, sustainable life? No, and this is why we believe that Pikettism must be regarded as a disease (Pohoăță 2016) whose catastrophic consequences were exemplary captured a century ago by Berdyaev (2015), who lived through that traumatic experience. Yet, it appears that not everyone has been vaccinated against it.

It would be good if these thousands of sustainability activists were only to offer a welcomed critique. Everyone has the right to say what he thinks about sustainability. But their attempt is one of dilution and confusion, distorting the concept. And for economics, dilution of the concept by abusive use leads to its trivialization. What impression are you left with, for example, if under the title *The Illusion of Sustainability*, you find out

that it is possible to talk about the sustainability of anti-parasitism (Kremer and Miguel 2007)?

Fourthly, a definition captures only the essence of the phenomenon, leaving its forms of development and determinants open. The assertion that the wording of the Brundtland Report gives a definition does not stand. Accusations of a deceitful trick played on the Third World do not constitute criticisms of a definition. They may be considered so when applied to a message, a suggestion, a process analysis, but not to a definition. A definition might be criticized for the degree of abstraction or the clarity of the formulation. However, it is not so much a definition when it refers to the system, the way of organizing the economy and the appropriate society for sustainable development. If alternatives like free market—étatism, democracy—“inclusive freedom of society” (Deb 2009, p. 366), “inclusive markets”—“extractive markets” (Acemoglu and Robinson 2012), are being brought into discussion, are we still talking about a definition or are we referring to a process, a good mechanism for development with the name of sustainability? Is it not recognized that in economics, as in any other realm of existence, not everything requires a definition? If things follow clearly, do we find no other way to affirm them, other than confusing them?

Fifthly, it has been asserted that ideology is the true enemy of economics’ objectivity. Marx told us so, thinking of others. Schumpeter explained it, deceiving us in a consoling manner that its legacy does not last for eternity (Schumpeter 2008). We feel it fully today when we realize, helplessly, that by retaining the spirit of Political Economy, its validation is achieved through legislation. Ideology can confirm or deny it to suit the interests of lawmakers. The fact that sustainable development has become a slogan of current politics is worthy of consideration. If this latest expression—sustainable development—used by economists to articulate the ultimate goal of growth has become an appealing slogan for winning votes, it raises serious concern for the status of this science.

Overall, where the criticism comes from, the target is the alleged definition of sustainable development. The attributes used range from vague, dangerous, pretext to exploit someone, undefined, slogan, too broad, trick, naive conception, a central element of rhetoric with a powerful fashion effect, technology-like cliché and a dogma maker (to live in harmony with...), attractive yet dubious, oxymoron, hidden form of protectionism, magical and inconsistent concept but, yet... unavoidable!

If this is the case, can this concept serve an objective analysis? What can undermine a concept more than the assertion that the only unanimity of opinion is based on its lack of content? So, if you can juggle with it to say almost anything, it is clear that the term sustainable development can no longer “become the exact reflection, the perfect double, the unmisted mirror of a non-verbal knowledge” (Foucault 2005, p. 323). Instead of neutralizing scientific language to provide the necessary logical rigour, it serves to perform ideological acrobatics that have a flavour of mysticism, similar to the “diplomacy by terminology” phenomenon explained by Gunnar Myrdal when referring to the “developing country” expression (Myrdal 1970, pp. 33–36).

If, however, it is unavoidable or obligatory, as the philosopher Luc Ferry (1995) says, but also disavowed, what can we do? What is to be done for sustainable development to become an operative, meaningful concept with an unequivocal core? As we suggested, the solution is to cleanse it by reverting to the sound core of classical and, in part, neoclassical economics.

1.3 HOW DO WE UNDERSTAND THE BRUNDTLAND REPORT?

The text of the Brundtland Report has been analysed, appreciated or criticized from various perspectives. If things continue in this manner, there is every chance that it will acquire the status of the concept it has conceived—sustainable development. It will relativize and dilute until it transmits nothing. Can it gain support? And if so, on what grounds? For the most part, such an effort is worth it to defend the idea of the general and generous message which it conveys. Then, it has to be done because the Brundtland version of sustainability is the only one that can validate the ideas that came to us from the founders of development theory. And it does so because Brundtland sustainability represents the current concept, the functioning mental framework, the norm that no one can ignore.

What is to be challenged in the Report and what is to be accepted?

Firstly, its target audience! It is said to be a message for intellectuals and for the developed world. What are the others to do? Was there no universal Walrasian *commissaire-priseur* to read the message in all the languages of the earth?

This criticism lacks substance. The lesson of the text is valid to anyone interested. The Report states that there are no ideal models of sustainable development (World Commission on Environment and Development 1987), and that each country offers its own measure. Is it Mrs. Brundtland's fault that intellectuals in the Afghan government are not dealing with the transmission of this message to their fellow citizens? We do not think so. Would it upset these citizens to find out that such a report also includes them in *Our Common Future*? It is understandable that the perception of the message is different in a developed country than in an emerging or underdeveloped one, in a former colony compared to a colonial metropolis, in one that has experienced the trauma of communism as opposed to one that has not known such an experience. History, culture, the institutional systems, the level and the quality of resources, the emphasis on education and production, the power to repress feelings caused by a humiliating past and to start over, all these create the chemistry whereby the message of the Report comes to life—combines forces or dislocates them. And it dislocates them if governments in the underdeveloped world do not fulfil their primary function of creating an enlightened public opinion, helping citizens to understand and, if necessary, transform the conditions they face.

Secondly, the following expression synthesizes the content of the Report: “without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (World Commission on Environment and Development 1987, p. 41). The keyword here is *ability*. Because the moral obligation towards the future is uncertain and difficult to assess, Robert Solow (2005) notes that the orientation on capacity is essential and realistic. Amartya Sen and Sudhir Anand build on the idea by alluding to the problem of intra-generational relationships, arguing that the capacity of the present generation to solve the problem of poverty of those that coexist with them is also important (Anand and Sen 2000). The “moral obligation” (World Commission on Environment and Development 1987, p. 52) of any generation is, indeed, to help the latter to develop their own abilities, in terms of craftsmanship and skills, so as to meet their own needs. How? Teaching them how to fish, not simply giving them a fish; passing on knowledge that will encourage the agility of mind and help them meet other needs in different circumstances. If this requirement is met, then, in line with the idea of progress, those who come after us will be more capable, or at least as capable as we are,

in shaping their life plan and ensuring that it is feasible. It is an individual life plan whose outline, character and structure cannot be clearly sketched by those living in the present. In a constantly changing world, the idea of accurately projecting an individual life plan for another human is futile. From such a perspective, learning and study occupy such an important place within the programme. Learning must be acquired from all available sources: from family or in school; from economists, philosophers, sociologists, literati and engineers; for example, by reading Smith's splendid lines about domestic education as an "institution of nature" in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (Smith 2004, p. 261) or from Confucius. The latter can convince us that, millennia ago, sustainable development had supporters. From him, we explicitly learn that education opens doors towards everything, and that this is the safest way to happiness, uncovering for those who are interested all there is to know about moral desiderata. Confucius and Socrates can be regarded as pioneers of the economy of happiness. Who, more than Socrates, was satisfied with little and saw fulfilment beyond conspicuous consumption? Who has more effectively sought equality among people by walking the path of peace and social equilibrium, topics close to sustainable development? Or, if we are to continue the path of the notable ancient precursors of sustainability, Xenophon is also worth consideration. His work on the growth of horses is a first sign, received from an approved philosopher that our happiness must not be dissociated from that of animals (Xenophon 2006).

The ultimate goal of development is not a discovery of this Report. Walras (2014), followed by Pareto (2014), explicitly drew attention to the fact that economic efficiency is a nonsense if it is not matched by social efficiency. Their preparatory steps outline what will eventually become the social market economy. Basically, this is a concept of German origin that seeks to reconcile economics with the wider social dimension. It is true, the environment has not been an explicit concern for those who have launched the idea of a social market economy, but where more than in the German space, is nature at home? Or, in order to acquire a realistic and current understanding, a reading of the provisions of the UN Charter would be worthwhile in parallel with Oliver Williamson's (1985) texts on opportunism. The enthusiasts who dream of entering this globalized world as in a huge dance of universal brotherhood will quickly be immunized, discovering from the realist Nobel Prize winner that opportunism refers to "self-interest seeking with guile" which "more often involves subtle forms of deceit" (Williamson 1985, p. 47).

In short, responsible parents, a good school, generous readings on the whole range of knowledge can endow one with the abilities that Mrs. Brundtland refers to. From these same sources, one learns that it is indeed a moral duty not to leave behind an empty, polluted or predatorily exploited planet.

Concentrating our discourse on the creation and cultivation of abilities, generation after generation, we will be exempt from unanswered questions. We will be relieved of the nonsense of accurately defining the needs of the present generation in order to compare them with the needs of unborn generations. The needs of some of the present generation, where poverty and failure make lives difficult or unhappy, are more acute and more concrete. Future generations will know what their needs are, and, above all, they will know how to fulfil them if we teach them how to fish. And if we teach them well, they will look back and smile at our conceptual confusion about developing the development of all sustainable development. They will cherish us not for our proud and empty oxymorons, but because we sent them to school. Then, the obsession with physical and monetary terms will diminish. The theoretical concern that by increasing prices the consumption of non-renewable resources will be reduced is welcomed. Even if 80% of the world's resources are used by 20% of the world's population—and, indeed such a solution might have full justification—who makes such a decision? Finding that global supply exceeds global demand, who proceeds, normatively, to the much-needed redistribution for the poor? Neither the Brundtland Report nor those of the Club of Rome offer any normative guidance. A world government that can do so, imagined as possible by Piketty (2014), and welcomed by Krugman (2014), remains a utopia. Non-utopia remains the idea that future generations will not spread their bread with prices instead of butter. The idea remains that tenacious, thorough, honest and qualified work will help them solve the dilemma regarding the complementarity or substitutability of nature with capital. Alternatively, new energy sources may solve the problem of raw materials, and as a result, Georgescu-Roegen's (1971) entropy remains a valid lesson only to those who distrust the force of human creation.

Thirdly, the Brundtland message is a general one, but it is one about development. It starts from growth, proceeds through economic progress and arrives at a generalized social progress. No area of human activity remains unimpeded in targeting the goal. Lacking direction, the theme of development or its latest name—sustainable development—seems to be

no longer the pinnacle of economics; anyone can deal with it. Economists and non-economists alike have greatly contributed to this perception. When an economist like Serge Latouche (2007) declares that the issue of sustainable development must be removed from the economists' tutelage to receive a friendlier analysis from intellectuals, what does he actually achieve? He confirms not Adam Smith, who was very clear about what the economist should do, but rather Joseph Schumpeter, who wrote, "most of us, not content with their scientific task [...] bring into their work their individual schemes of values and all their policies and politics – the whole of their moral personalities up to their spiritual ambitions" (Schumpeter 2008, p. 208). This is precisely what Latouche does. Making use of his moral authority, he describes development as one "toxic word" (Latouche 2007) and in line with Georgescu-Roegen's path, invokes degrowth as the ultimate mechanism to bring about the happiness of the world. The same Georgescu-Roegen pointed out that "No science has been criticized by its own servants as openly and constantly as economics" (Georgescu-Roegen 1971, p. 1).

This has left economics in an unlikely place; an area between a reality that disqualifies it and an alleged universalism that dilutes it; between looking for sustainability in the study of intestinal parasite treatment (Kremer and Miguel 2007) and the torture of finding infallible indices to measure happiness on the planet (Hecht 2007). This is the source of a loss of systemic vision and the false identification of some areas as potentially more dangerous than others, declaring the ecological footprint as a basis for transitioning from development to, simply put, sustainable development. The change brought about, naturally, the temptation of creating a new specialized science, ecological economics or its ultimate form, the science of sustainability.

It is true that the Report has generated a new attitude towards the environment, which is welcomed and certainly well documented. At the same time, a social uproar has accompanied the ecological one by triggering economic analyses in the area of anti-profit justice which are thus unintentionally anti-entrepreneurial and unsympathetic to the very foundations of economic dynamics. To this picture, we can add the chorus of those who play the tune of the rational state, to the extent that those who really create wealth wonder why they should continue to do so. We believe that the Brundtland Report has suggested no such thing. But it created the opportunity for many to do it. The social tremor, the fiction of living equally and happily, in which too many have put their hopes,

has for almost half a century destroyed the economy of a good part of the world. It is preferable for the promulgators of such a thought not to put imagination before experience or to discover what those who have already experienced confiscation think. Or to fathom the conviction that those who followed Smith and not Marx succeeded because they believed above all in indisputable natural rights, in the context of liberal democracy. The power of democracy is not absolute, nor convincing for all. But just as we cannot impose virtues on the underdeveloped world by force, likewise we cannot deceive ourselves that an institutional culture that bears fruits in the US will have the same results in Bhutan.

On the whole, the conclusion of all these contributions thus far is summed up in the following sentences: (1) development no longer seems to be the main theme of economics nor indeed its domain; (2) the economist is no longer in charge of economic diagnosis; and (3) the value grids of each of the three components, namely ecological, economic or social, may or may not define the status of sustainability.

Therefore, where can we find inspiration in this regard?

Mohammed Rabie provides an integrated, up-to-date vision of development, with a strong institutional tone in his book *The Theory of Sustainable Sociocultural and Economic Development* (Rabie 2016). When he sketches a programme that targets sustainable development, he gets caught up in the mirage of thoughts raised to the rank of orthodoxy and not only places redistribution at the forefront, but also fails to mention any measure related to production. An outline of Mohammed Rabie's analysis is as follows:

1. "Distribute income fairly among social classes and nations;
2. Reduce the world's annual population growth rate to near 1%;
3. Transform world cultures;
4. Reduce annual military spending by all nations, especially the great and regional powers, to 2% of their GDPs or less; and
5. Liberate all nations from the burden of public debt" (Rabie 2016, p. 28).

It is perhaps surprising that the author of a valuable book does not recognize that without growth everything is futile. But if he establishes

such an order of priorities, can we learn from it what sustainable development is, and how it might be achieved? If we cannot, where might we look for guidance?

Do we find it in the works of a historian like Yuval Noah Harari? Maybe. His book, *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind* (Harari 2015), does not explicitly propose a sustainability analysis. But after reading his book, you begin to doubt the erudite treatises on sustainability. And you understand what you must about sustainability.

The renowned economist David Landes, in his book *The Wealth and Poverty of Nations: Why Some Are So Rich and Some So Poor* (Landes 1999), presents a picture of what he thinks would be the ideal case of a growing and developing society. We describe this exceptionally articulated sketch, noting that it starts where everyone should start: “[...] manage, and build the instruments of production” (Landes 1999, p. 217). It is notable that nothing escapes the text. The expression “sustainable development” is not used, but that is what it is all about. It is a text that should be quoted and necessary in any work on development, sustainability, resilience or whatever we wish to call it:

“This ideal growth-and-development society would be one that

1. Knew how to operate, manage, and build the instruments of production and to create, adapt, and master new techniques on the technological frontier.
2. Was able to impart this knowledge and know-how to the young, whether by formal education or apprenticeship training.
3. Chose people for jobs by competence and relative merit; promoted and demoted on the basis of performance.
4. Afforded opportunity to individual or collective enterprise; encouraged initiative, competition, and emulation.
5. Allowed people to enjoy and employ the fruits of their labor and enterprise.

These standards imply corollaries: gender equality (thereby doubling the pool of talent); no discrimination on the basis of irrelevant criteria (race, sex, religion, etc.); also, a preference for scientific (means-end) rationality over magic and superstition (irrationality).

Such a society would also possess the kind of political and social institutions that favor the achievement of these larger goals [...].

More corollaries: this society would be marked by geographical and social mobility. [...] This society would value new as against old, youth as against

experience, change and risk as against safety. It would not be a society of equal shares, because talents are not equal; but it would tend to a more even distribution of income than is found with privilege and favour. It would have a relatively large middle class. This greater equality would show in more homogeneous dress and easier manners across class lines” (Landes 1999, pp. 217–218).

1.4 WHAT IS SUSTAINABILITY? THE SUSTAINABILITY-DURABILITY-RESILIENCE KIT

We are convinced that, irrespective of other synonyms, sustainable development has, first and foremost, a decisive link with the economy. The most generous social and environmental policies remain unsupported if the economy does not work. To believe otherwise might be more engaging, but certainly, also more ephemeral. The economy has emerged as a science with the ultimate goal of teaching people how to produce wealth faster and more efficiently, so as to satisfy the growing trend of consumption. How this wealth is divided among the members of the community for the benefit of each is a matter of concern. Economists have never been inhumane. They have always pursued policies to produce satisfaction by designing mechanisms with self-propelling and obstacle-overcoming force. They thought their approach was sustainable, that is, with its own power to function and overcome obstacles, just as the Latin *sustinēre* says and as Walt Rostow (1959) rightly observed, using the syntax of self-sustaining growth. They have seen obstacles with possible origins within the economic and social body as well as beyond; related to production, distribution, exchange or consumption; to the way in which the actors of economic life, both governmental and private ones, respect or disregard the job description resulting from an institutional arrangement designed to make life possible; regarding the sphere of politics and geopolitics; and in relation to the environment and resources. On any of these lines of human action, sustainability analysis can be successfully employed. This can be achieved by starting from the premise that what we conclude about any of the aspects must be integrated into the fabric of the whole. Logic demands it. It is nonsense to talk about the sustainability of consumption and the unsustainability of production.

Sustainability is of the ensemble. Hence, sustainability requires a systemic, holistic, macroeconomic vision.

The idea of sustainability gains contour and meaning with reference to a country. The sustainability of the global economy is, for now, a phantasm. A sustainability map, by country or region, does not draw sustainability as a continuous line. The quality of resources, natural and human, the institutional culture, the quality of rules and players, the entrepreneurial vocation, the saving and investing spirit have, throughout history, been responsible for the level of sustainability. And the level varies both within and between countries over time. Also, depending on capacity and inspiration, each country requires another measurement method to assess its robustness to shocks and the chance of progress without syncope—in other words, to measure resilience. No other concept is closer to sustainability than resilience, which it includes and validates, or not, in moments of major economic crises. In such circumstances, it is clear what is the position of each country regarding sustainability. Then, it is neither environmental nor social policies that are tested. They all will depend on how the economy fares, their status being a consequence rather than a starting point. This has been seen in the last two major crises, a result of the unhealthy way in which the nominal economy has broken away from the real economy. The manipulation of monetary mechanisms costs everyone everywhere, including the social and natural environment.

Sustainability cannot be tested in the short term. The scope of the process to which it refers, that of development, requires long-term analyses. Indeed, long-term development and, likewise, long-term sustainability are, we would argue, tautologies. Concisely, the simple assertion that an economy is sustainable means that its dynamic comprises robustness, viability and a capacity to overcome social, environmental or resource constraints. As far as the sustainable-durable synonym is concerned, this concerns the translation of the term “sustainable” from English into French—“durabilité”. But durable means the same thing as sustainable and also alludes to the functionality of an economy without major obstacles.

In outlining and arguing such points of view, the limited inventory of sustainability definitions that we have explored does not help us, as we anticipated. Most of them are preparing the stage for degrowth. We do not accept such an idea for a number of significant reasons. We are interested in the fundamentals, the origins of sustainable development.

We will search for them in the works of Smith, Ricardo, Malthus, Mill, Say and Bastiat. We will be attentive to the echoes of their thoughts in the sources of economic dynamics, reviled, updated or developed by the likes of Jevons, Menger, Hicks, Nordhaus, Rostow, Kuznets, Acemoglu, Diamond, Jeffrey Sachs, Solow and Stiglitz. The social component, so important in sustaining economic dynamics, refers us to Perroux, Schumpeter or Keynes. Thanks to Walras, Pareto or Nash, we will be convinced that there are no ideal models of sustainability. Through them, we find positive direction towards a robust, sustainable economy. We add that Marshall or Pigou will serve as examples of what sustainability represents, at its origins, from the perspective of the relationship between economic dynamics and the environment.

1.5 ASSUMED ECLECTICISM WITHIN A NON-HISTORY OF ECONOMIC IDEAS: ABOUT WHOM AND WHAT WE ARE GOING TO DISCUSS

In our search of additional rigour and clarity for our topic, we subject the return towards the founders to an exercise of decantation. Not everything they have written serves our initiative. From their “rounded” work, we only extract that which consolidates our argument. It is clear that the sum of these pieces extracted from harmoniously outlined unitary systems does not form another whole. Yet, we knowingly resort to this puzzle in order to achieve our goal; to show that there are unexplored or very little exploited areas in the works of the founders of economics that hold great potential for the endeavour of the necessary relocation of sustainability theory within its natural domain. Our treatment of these areas may appear, at first sight, to be dominated by a baffling eclecticism, lacking the unity of a clearly defined perspective and object of study. It certainly seems this way when tackling a broad range of subjects, such as: inequality, human cooperation and the division of labour, accumulation and the production–distribution–exchange–consumption logic inspired by Smith, the market, property and money as informal institutions, the stationary state, non-material happiness, the dialectics of the natural price of both commodities and money, the disciplinary characteristic of the natural rate of interest and the roundabout method of production. The impression one is left with is that of hopelessness. Yet, beyond that first initial impression, one can see that we do not compromise when it comes to the unity

of our construct. It is achieved by means of method. The very different places we have visited “speak” the same language and, albeit in different ways, serve the same purpose: to show that sustainability is in its element within the founders’ framework. In other words, returning to the beginning is important for the attempt of detaching the theory of sustainable development from the trivializing forms that smother it, even if these beginnings amount to ideas and views that bear no visible connection between themselves.

At the same time, at first sight, volume one of our work may look like a short history of economic doctrines. In fact, it is not, and it cannot be such a thing. Even if the pieces extracted for the purpose of our argumentation are quite substantial, they do not say everything there is to say about the authors they belong to and their work. They serve our endeavour but simply jotting them down does not amount to recounting history. It may resemble, in part, a history of the analysis of the evolution of the idea of sustainability, in the same sense that Schumpeter (1986) has ascribed to the concept of analysis. The fact that many other problems tackled in the works of the founders, which do not directly serve our purpose, are knowingly skipped does not support the idea that our work is purely historical.

We should also take notice that the founders whom we have used as reference did not write about sustainability in the manner we understand it today from the standpoint of the tridimensional doctrine of economics-society-environment. It is certain that it was not their goal to do so. There was no debate on the topic of sustainable or unsustainable development. There was only one type of development whose goal was to bring prosperity and which was primarily judged from a quantitative perspective. Social and environmental problems were not clearly delineated. They were contained within the organic whole of economic theory and, without being disproportionately insisted upon, they conferred roundness and meaning to the endeavours of the founders.

For a while now, it is customary that the work of the founders’ descendants be referred to as mainstream economics. It is generally accepted that the whole neoclassical tradition is “drowned” into the mainstream. The fact that great Nobel laureates such as Solow, Arrow and Samuelson stay faithful to the marginalist doctrine of the neoclassicists as a method of analysis but do not break away from the sturdy core of classicist economics is often ignored. As in any other area of knowledge, the domain of economics is also subject to a cumulative process. That which

proved timeless within the theoretical corpus of the past is updated and retained within the theoretical corpus of the present. Quoting the contemporaries, the neo-neoclassicists, does not mean that we forget about the founding neoclassicists or classicists. They did not and will not die (Colander 2000). What has died, as resulting from the referenced article, is the good habit of also referencing primary sources. When, during the course of our endeavour, we referenced many neoclassicists such as Wieser, Menger, Böhm-Bawerk, Jevons, Marshall, Pigou, Walras, Pareto or Wicksell to name only a few representatives, we have done so using the classification that has been standard in the majority of economic history treatises ever since Thorstein Veblen has first coined the term “neoclassical” (Aspromourgos 1986). From the neoclassicists as well as the unmistakable classicists, we wanted to find out what form sustainability takes in the works of those who had the privilege of being deemed the founders of economic science. In the second volume, we will also deal with a part of their descendants which tackled the subject of sustainability. In this volume, apart from the classicists, we also draw inspiration from the founding neoclassicists. And the founding neoclassicists were and still are considered the initiators of the marginalist revolution and the subjective theory of value. In their three versions—English, Austrian and Swiss—they sought to impose a new research method and direct the science which they served towards new research goals. We deem their direct contribution to the analysis to be beneficial and helpful in offering a new perspective to sustainable development, in regard to both economic theory and practice.

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