

From Sustainable Development to Sustainability: The Response of Business

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1 Introduction

What is the concept of ‘sustainable development’? Why has it recently increasingly morphed into ‘sustainability.’ What does it mean for business and politics?

The concept ‘sustainable development’ is a highly contested one; it could be considered what Gallie (1955–1956) once referred to as an ‘essentially contested concept’ whose application is inherently a matter of dispute. The subtle shift to ‘sustainability’ is part of that contestation—and should be recognised as such. Failure to recognise this is to seriously diminish the potential of the concept to achieve the hopes held for it.

Some would argue that is no bad thing. I have variously heard sustainable development described as an oxymoron, or as ‘just words’. But words and their meanings are important—fundamentally important—to addressing public policy problems. We cannot devise laws or public policies unless we can define what it is we are doing. Yet developing shared understandings of problems, while not all the story of gaining political support, then is at least much of it, and the very vagueness which limits policy effectiveness can help with policy adoption—and therein lies a dilemma.

But even vague concepts can exert a discursive hegemony. One needs only listen to deliberative bodies at the national or international level to realise the discipline which concepts such as ‘sustainable development’, ‘polluter pays’ and ‘precautionary principle’ impose upon the freedom of action of participants. True, many might not be strong adherents to the concept, and some might be attempting to subvert it, but even they must at least neutralise the power or the presence of the concept in the prevailing discourse brings.

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In this paper I take a critical look at the notions of ‘sustainable development’, ‘sustainability’ and some of the related notions, in order to establish their contested and problematic nature. I then examine the challenges for applying these concepts to business politics, and conclude that business has not been a mere passive recipient of the normative implications of these concepts, but has used them in various ways to its own advantage.

2 Balancing Environment and Development

Sustainable development came to prominence with the publication of the Brundtland Report, *Our Common Future*, in 1987. Quite clearly, it has its origins in the conflict between essentially ‘Northern’ concerns with environmental protection and ‘Southern’ development aspirations—and fears that the pursuit of the environmental agenda would result in the development ‘ladder’ being pulled up behind themselves by affluent nations.

These concerns were not without foundation, and they dated back to the emergence of the modern environmental agenda in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Moreover, sustainable development was merely the latest manifestation of attempts to moderate this conflict, and one which attempted to accommodate adherents to both sets of beliefs, allowing them to worship together in the same church.

As Donald Worster (1993) put it, sustainable development promised an easier path forward. Modern, neo-Malthusian environmentalism seemed to demand an impossible agenda, still cherished by some, of limits to growth in population, technology and appetite and greed—in short, a whole new philosophy which was politically highly problematic. Sustainable development provided a quite functional blurring of the environmentalism of the North and the development needs of the South. In Worster’s (1993: 143) words, ‘lots of lobbyists coming together, lots of blurring going on—invariably, lots of shallow thinking resulting.’

It is easy to forget just how frightening the neo-Malthusian spectre must have appeared when viewed from the South. Not only were influential authors such as Ehrlich (1968), Hardin (1972, 1977), and Commoner (1966, 1972) warning that key resources would be depleted within our lifetimes, but their prescriptions included some quite draconian measures, especially with regard to limiting population, which were much more alarming to developing nations than to those which had undergone the demographic transition which has almost universally accompanied industrialization and the state provision of social security for the elderly. We hear much less now of the need for survival, triage, arks and ‘lifeboat ethics’, all of which rang alarm bells for those who did not have a seat in the lifeboat and whose attempts to get on board were to be thwarted by those who feared the boat thus must be swamped (Pirages and Ehrlich 1973; Lucas and Ogletree 1976). This, of course, echoes the debate which surrounded the first manifestation of Malthusian thinking, which was roundly criticised by Marx and others for underestimating the possibilities of technological change and, most of all, for neglecting the class-based

institutional factors which resulted in the axe of subsistence falling on the necks of the poor. It should be noted that Marx's hostility to the environment was much overstated, and he even produced his own principle of population, which (by requiring attention to factors such as the social distribution of scarcity as well as mere numbers of the population) suggested that progress was possible without Malthusian collapse (Harvey 1974).

While the poor within affluent societies were less able to contest the distributive consequences of environmental policies, wide disparities in wealth between nations meant that global responses required the development of some kind of accommodation between rich and poor, because the decision rule in international politics is one of consensus and any single nation-state can thwart consensus. For this reason, right from the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in 1972 in Stockholm, the international environmental agenda has been politically inseparable from questions of global distributive justice. This was given significant symbolic expression in the location of the headquarters of the UN Environment Program in Nairobi—in a Developing Country. But it was also reflected in the highly circumscribed mandate given to UNEP, which is not an executive agency empowered to carry out its own programs in member states, like UNESCO or FAO. It is a poorly resourced agency which can only seek to influence governments and intergovernmental organisations.

UNEP's lack of resources and consequent dependence on voluntary contributions leave it open to having its agenda shaped by those prepared to support particular programs financially, but restrictions on its mandate plus the usual limitations on its ability to transgress the sovereignty of member states mean that it is caught in a cleft stick between the preferences of affluent nations able to afford to worry more about the global environment and the developing nations fearful of that agenda, and wishing to ensure UNEP had little capacity to force any agenda contrary to their interests.

3 The Origins of Sustainable Development

One can see the obvious appeal to UNEP of a concept that promised that both environmental protection and economic development for poor nations were possible simultaneously.

Early development of the concept of sustainable development took place at a joint UNEP-UNCTAD symposium on patterns of resource use, environment and development at Cocoyoc, Mexico in 1974, but it was not UNEP which made the first substantial step in this direction. Rather, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature produced a World Conservation Strategy (WCS) in 1980. The WCS not only attempted to ensure that the development agenda informed the environmental agenda, but it also attempted the reverse, and drew attention to the need for development efforts to be based upon a respect for ecological processes. After the WCS, the concept appeared in 1981 in the book *Building a Sustainable*

Society, by Lester R. Brown of the Worldwatch Institute and in Norman Myers' *Gaia: An Atlas of Planet Management* in 1984.

One could object that economists such as Herman Daly (1973), in emphasising a 'steady state' economy in which the rate of material throughput was constant, but in which wealth could continue to grow, laid the intellectual foundation in the early 1970s for the later conceptual blurring, but historians of economic thought will remind us that the stationary state featured in the thought of liberal political economists in the nineteenth century, such as John Stuart Mill. The difference, of course, is that Mill saw the stationary state negatively, with economic growth grinding to a halt, while Daly saw regarded it as a positive alternative to the 'zero economic growth' the neo-Malthusians saw as being demanded by the limits of the natural environment.

The origins of the word 'sustainability'—'that magic word of consensus' as Worster (1993: 144) describes it—lie in the concept of 'sustained yield' which emerged first in 'scientific' forestry in Germany in the late eighteenth century. As Robert Lee (cited by Worster 1993: 145) has noted, it came not just as a response to the decline in German forests, but as a response to the uncertainty and social instability which wracked Germany at that time (and which were responsible at least in part for the decline in German forests). It was an instrument of a strong state for ordering social and economic conditions which stood as a 'necessary' counterweight to emergent laissez-faire capitalism.

The publication of the Brundtland Report and the subsequent UN Conference on Environment and Development at Rio de Janeiro in 1992 therefore represented merely the refinement and institutionalisation of the concept of sustainable development which had evolved over the course of two decades, but which has its roots more deeply embedded in apprehensive reactions to the Enlightenment. Such reactions can be utopian—even millenarian—responses to rapid social change.

There have been numerous analyses of environmentalism in millenarian terms. For example, Buell (1995) analysed 'environmental apocalypticism', while Killingsworth and Palmer (1996) and Lee (1997) have described the millenarian aspects of the contemporary environment movement. Stewart and Harding (1999: 289–290) saw environmental concerns as but one of a number of *fin de siècle* concerns:

"During the 1990s, apocalypticism, and, somewhat less flamboyantly, its millennialist twin, have become a constant and unavoidable presence in everyday life. Idioms of risk, trauma, threat, catastrophe, conspiracy, victimization, surveillance; social, moral, and environmental degradation; reconvert, redemption, the New Age, and the New World Order permeate the airways."

This is not to say that sustainability necessarily entails elements these darker strands of thought, but it is (given the widespread tendency not to regard the concept as problematic) necessary to establish that the concept should be regarded uncritically as something to be pursued.

4 From ‘Sustainable Development’ to ‘Sustainability’

Sustainable development represents an attempt to mediate a deeply embedded conflict (Redclift 1987). Not surprisingly, the definition of the term and the manner in which it has been operationalised have exhibited a continuation of that tension in various ways.

At the international level, it is fair to say that the South has sought to exploit the linkage between environment and development to advantage in international negotiations, with insistence on double standards provisions, technology transfer, capacity building, and other means of channelling development assistance as their price of consent to international agreements. At the domestic level in affluent nations we have seen various attempts to tilt the scales of interpretation back in favour of the environment and away from the economy. In Australia, the success of the environment groups in inserting the word ‘ecologically’ into what became known as the Ecologically Sustainable Development Process was something of a coup, but it came at the cost of alienating industry from the process.

Similarly, the focus in this chapter on ‘sustainability’ reflects a subtle shift in environmental circles to drop the word ‘development.’ My analysis suggests caution in taking this too far, lest part of the ‘congregation’ not continue their worship. There is virtue in vagueness in mediating conflict—even if this lack of conceptual clarity is often the source of failed policy ambition.

There is no clear consensus on what sustainability means, but there are some fundamental questions inherent in all this. Sustainable for how long? Are ecosystems to be sustained? Or should the emphasis be on the sustainability of human societies? If so, should it be all humanity? Nation-states? Or subgroups including traditional societies threatened by development activities? (Sneddon 2000).

Many of the conceptualisations which aim to settle this matter rest—as eventually did the ESD process in Australia—on a notion of *ecological* sustainability. But how helpful is this? Ecologists once thought that nature, left free of human interference, would eventually reach a steady state (or climax community), but over the past 30 years ecological disturbance has replaced the climax community as the prevailing theme among most ecological scientists. It is a point of some interest that in the popular imagination, the stability of the climax community is probably still the dominant ‘myth of nature’, sustained by constant repetition by political ecologists, and like sustained yield in Germany, no doubt offering the promise of stability in uncertain and rapidly changing times (Kirkman 1997, White and Pickett 1995).

An ecological science in which perturbation, turbulence, disturbance, succession and flux are the norm creates insurmountable problems for ecocentric philosophical positions. While we are not reduced to seeing nature in purely utilitarian terms, it does place the emphasis back on human choice—in Botkin’s (1990) terms, we must choose among the discordant harmonies of nature those elements we wish to retain. We must reject nature as providing norms which guide how we must live and accept instead that we are part of a living, changing system; we can choose to accept, use, or control elements to make for a habitable existence, both singly and individually.

The very science of ecology reflects certain social and political beliefs. Ecology is full of terms like ‘natural enemies’ which were first used metaphorically, but are now frequently used non-problematically and in different contexts to that of their first usage. Chew and Laubichler (2003) have concluded that many, if not most, ecological concepts reflect familiar cultural experience. They note that the discipline is replete with value-laden terms such as ‘alien’, ‘colonize’, ‘community’, ‘competition’, ‘contest’, ‘disturbance’, ‘efficiency’, ‘enemy’, ‘invasive’, ‘native’, ‘stability’ and ‘territory.’ We can add others to their analysis, including ‘collapse’ and ‘threshold’, a term borrowed from physics and now pervasive in ecology, and while it is sometimes used with justification, it is often invoked as a threat, a point which once crossed, one can never return to. This language reflects emotional connotations which are culturally biased and which draw scientists and the public alike towards views that may be at odds with fundamental biological principles. There are many dangers inherent in words like ‘natural’ and ‘unnatural’ and the danger of teleology is omnipresent, as the notion of a climax community can suggest a purpose, or a natural or divine design at work.

One danger relates to the problem foreshadowed above: the assumption that nature is balanced and harmonious, and that this ‘sacred balance’ (Suzuki and McConnell 1997) depends upon maintaining high levels of biodiversity. Those espousing this view are in contradiction of Lord May’s work (1973), which suggested instability could result even from highly complex systems. Philip Stott (1998) points out that, despite the cogent critique of the idea of stability as the norm in ecology from about 1910, its practitioners continue to speak of climax, optima, balance, harmony, equilibria, stability, and so on—and to focus on the ‘exotic other’ of rainforests and the giant panda (noting that WWF eschews the smallpox virus and the rat as symbols of biodiversity in favour of this charismatic megafauna). He argues that the language which depicts fire, drought, seasonality and cold as ‘ecological stresses’ is possible only if we maintain a misplaced norm of stability.

Various theoretical assumptions underpinning modern political ecology relate to the prevailing belief that nature exists in some delicate and harmonious balance, so that any anthropogenic interference such as actions causing species extinction might trigger catastrophic ecological collapse. Stephen Budiansky has pointed out how much of modern ‘political ecology’ (that which forms the discourse of environmental activists) is good poetry, but bad science (Budiansky 1995). An emphasis on disturbance and chaos also suggests we need be cautious about assuming we can manage resources at sustained yield, of course, and this is the basis for the emergence of the ‘precautionary principle’—although this too is frequently little more than a slogan with an infinite number of meanings.

What is telling is that environmental activists, most social scientists writing about environmental issues, and many ‘activist’ environmental scientists still cling to the myth of the ‘balance of nature’ that has long been rejected by ecology (Scoones 1999). By accepting this myth in the face of the scientific evidence, any change in ecosystems or climate can be attributed to human agency, and imparted

with deep social meaning—either apocalyptic or (if promising some eventual return to a stable state of grace) millenarian.

While Worster (1993) dismisses sustainability as a sloganeering approach to environmental problems, his solution lies in the direction of another slogan: biodiversity. He argues that we must make our first priority the strict preservation of the billion-year heritage of evolution of plant and animal life, and thus preserve all the species, subspecies, varieties, communities and ecosystems that we possibly can. We cannot stop every extinction, but we should avoid adding to the tally.

But even ‘biodiversity’ is frequently used as a slogan, and there are dangers in this, especially with the unquestioned belief that one simply cannot have enough of it. You will search long and hard for critical discussion of *how much* biodiversity we should seek (Cherfas 1994). There is an unquestioning belief that more is both always better and never sufficient, despite there being doubts as to whether the supposed benefits of diversity, such as ecosystem stability, are real. This is so not just because of the decline in acceptance of the notion of the climax community, but because there is evidence of resilience in simple systems and fragility in diverse systems (Budiansky 1995: 97–99).

5 Sustainability and Business

Slogans sometimes make for good politics, but they are a dangerous foundation for policy. Nevertheless, business today must engage an agenda that routinely includes ‘sustainable development’ or ‘sustainability’. But what does that entail for business politics? The recent push towards ‘sustainability’ is clearly more problematic for business, because it is essentially an attempt to ‘dehumanise’ sustainable development and ‘sustainable development’ still carries the promise of *some* development. Business has generally sought to engage positively with this agenda, along with numerous associated, often subsidiary concepts, such as ‘biodiversity’, ‘intermediate technology’, and so on. But because these parts of the agenda, too, are essentially slogans that can be highly problematic.

For example, a management plan for a national park in Germany was once saved from the efforts of environmental groups to write into it a requirement to ‘maximise biodiversity’ when ecologists in the parks agency realized the alpine ecosystem had low natural biodiversity (Haber 1993: 39). Similarly, sustainability needs to avoid assumptions that slogans such as ‘intermediate technology’ will deliver the right results. The tragedy of arsenic poisoning from tube wells in Bangladesh serves as an appropriate warning of basing policy on inadequate science. There, UNICEF and the World Bank encouraged the development of tube wells as a response to the problems of water-borne diseases and succeeded in reducing infant mortality and diarrheal illness by 50 % by the construction of 8 million tube wells, but it has been found that one in five of these wells is now contaminated with carcinogenic arsenic. Water had been tested and found suitable—for irrigation, but had not been tested for human consumption. Similarly, we need to be careful about translating risk

management decisions from developed to developing nations: Peru following US EPA assessments in deciding not to chlorinate drinking water caused thousands of deaths in the South American cholera epidemic of the 1990s (Anderson 1991; Lee and Dodgson 2000).

Business has frequently responded positively to the sustainable development agenda, especially (as David Vogel has shown) where regulation might create advantages for it (Vogel 1997).

Let me give two examples. In 1999 John Deere introduced an innovation that reduced emissions from 2-stroke engines on domestic power equipment by 70 % while improving fuel economy 30 %, all with only a minor cost increase. This ‘compression wave technology’ technology was then presented by John Deere to the US EPA with a push to tighten domestic emission standards. John Deere stood to gain by having standards set to advantage its technology, which it was also prepared to license to its competitors. There was therefore business support for an action that might be considered to be part of the sustainable development agenda, although whether domestic two-stroke pollution was a first-order problem is another matter. In another example, the German company Henkel developed phosphate substitutes—such as zeolites and polycarbonates—and licensed them internationally, but they caused rivers to foam in Switzerland where phosphates had been banned and possibly exacerbated algal blooms because of their toxicity for *Daphnia* (water fleas) which ate algae, and thus helped prevent algal blooms.

Many businesses in some sectors like fishing and forestry have engaged with their critics on sustainable development issues by undertaking product certification, provided by various councils on behalf of NGOs. Hartmut Elsenhans (2005: 21) has likened NGOs—particularly those which appeal to the ‘slacktivists’—to being in the business of selling ‘certificates of good conscience’ to ignorant buyers and claiming ‘Potemkin-like successes.’ Product certification schemes have the same basic structure as protection rackets: ‘pay us to certify, and we will ensure there are no boycotts.’ Nor are they necessarily effective in achieving their aims; a recent longitudinal study of ‘Fair Trade’ organic coffee producers in Nicaragua, for example (Beuchelt and Zeller 2011) found that they were disadvantaged when compared with those who declined to take out fair trade certification.

Some businesses, of course, benefit from policies designed to advance sustainable development: those specializing in pollution control, cleaner production, renewable energy, and other aspects of ‘ecological modernisation’ or ‘Green Keynesianism’. But how have resource extractive industries responded to the sustainable development agenda? How have businesses whose core business is the extraction of non-renewable resources responded to the call for sustainable development or (more problematically) sustainability? Forestry first developed the concept of sustained yield, but how can, mining companies—whose core business is the depletion of non-renewable resources—engage with the sustainable development agenda?

If we accept that sustainable development is about the sustainable development of human society, there is no great challenge. Harold Hotelling (1931) long ago set out the basic issues in considering the optimal rate at which a non-renewable

resource should be depleted: too slow a rate and future generations might not appreciate being left a resource that has little use for them (when they might be better off investing and enjoying the wealth created); too rapid a rate and future generations might be deprived of resources they need.

The way in which the mining industry has engaged with the sustainable development agenda has been to interpret it in such a way as to address the key issue that emerged for it over access to land. Whereas intellectual property rights and licences to market (based on efficacy and risk) are of paramount importance for sectors such as pharmaceuticals and synthetic chemicals, the mining sector has undifferentiated products and access to land—rights to prospect and to mine—are central for it. First at the domestic level in Australia and then internationally through the International Council on Mining and Metals (ICMM), the mining industry developed codes of conduct on issues such as treatment of indigenous people, mine site rehabilitation and mining in national parks.

Many NGOs have criticised such activity as ‘mere greenwashing’, and to some extent they are correct. The development of such proactive measures, described broadly as part of ‘corporate social responsibility’ have also been criticised by those who see firms as having no greater responsibilities than to obey the law and maximize returns for shareholders (Henderson 2001), but they are essentially defensive measures that might contribute to corporate profitability by staving off unfavourable regulation (as is the intention with much self-regulation) or, perhaps more importantly, litigation. We can demonstrate this by examining the origins (and motivations of the founder) of the business organization that specializes in business engagement with sustainable development, the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD). WBCSD was involved in the development of the Global Mining Initiative that led to the establishment of ICMM and its engagement with sustainable development.

The WBCSD was the brainchild of Stephan Schmidheiny. Maurice Strong was secretary general of the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio. In this role he established a forum for leading businessmen from all parts of the world that could develop a business perspective on environment and development challenges. This forum later evolved into the Business Council for Sustainable Development, which merged with the World Industry Council for the Environment in 1995 to form the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD). Schmidheiny was also co-chair with Secretary-General of the ICC, Maria Livanos-Cattai, of a High Level Group within the OECD appointed by Secretary-General Donald Johnston to progress the agendas of corporate social responsibility and sustainable development (Carroll and Kellow 2011).

In its 1997 report, *Guiding the Transition to Sustainable Development*, the High Level Group argued that ‘sustainable development reaches into the issues of minority rights, women’s rights, and, given the focus on the needs of future generations, children’s rights’ (Henderson 2001: 50). The group maintained that the OECD was facing a more difficult challenge than at any other time in its history. It argued that major ecosystems were in decline as a result of population and

economic growth, but national government policies on the economy, environment and social justice were badly disconnected and often incompatible. The report called on the OECD to take a lead in harmonising government policies, adopting sustainable development as an overarching strategic priority and redefining the mission it was given at its establishment of achieving 'sustainable economic growth' in terms of human and environmental terms, as well as economic. This move to embrace sustainable development and CSR has been severely criticized by a former Chief Economist of the OECD, David Henderson (Henderson 2001).

Schmidheiny's background tells much about engagement with sustainable development as a defensive corporate strategy. Schmidheiny had taken over as CEO of his family company, Eternit AG, in 1978 and embraced the CSR agenda with enthusiasm, and immediately announced that Eternit AG would renounce its core business: the production of asbestos products. By 1984, half of the company's production was asbestos-free, and the last asbestos products left the factory in 1994. The building products subsidiary was spun-off and renamed as Cemroc, so that Eternit AG is no longer a part of Schmidheiny's former Swiss Eternit Group, Eternit (Schweiz) AG. In 2006, Eternit (Schweiz) AG established the foundation Eternit-Werke Schweiz, to provide financial support to actual and former employees and their relatives affected by asbestos-related diseases arising from manufacturing at the plants (Eternit 2011).

Schmidheiny, now a resident of Costa Rica, has removed himself from all formal positions at Eternit. Recognised as a business leader, he was appointed to the boards of several leading companies, including becoming a member of the boards of directors of leading companies such as ABB Asea Brown Boveri, Nestlé, Swatch, and UBS AG. (This last corporation has achieved a degree of notoriety. UBS agreed, on February 18, 2009, to pay a fine of \$780 million to the U.S. Government to settle a suit on charges of conspiring to defraud the United States by impeding the Internal Revenue Service). Schmidheiny also gave about half his personal wealth of a little over \$2 billion to charity.

As a defensive strategy, sustainable development appears to have been relatively successful. Schmidheiny has been sentenced *in absentia* for negligent behavior in exposing Eternit's workers and citizens to asbestos in legal proceedings initiated in Italy in April 2009, but this legal action came much later than those against other asbestos manufacturers globally. The Eternit-Werke Schweiz foundation was also only established in 2006, much later than those established by similar companies, such as CSR or James Hardie in Australia.

While the question of whether CSR in general, and the sustainable development component of it in particular, will ever rise above the criticism that individual business firms and groups like WBCSD are engaging in mere 'greenwash' (Najam 1999) is unlikely ever to be settled definitively, the sustainability agenda has had an impact. Despite the criticisms by its former Chief Economist of the emergence of CSR as part of the agenda of the OECD, for example, the agenda is well-entrenched (not without controversy) in that organisation, with a current commitment to 'Green Growth' as a response to the exigencies of the Global Financial Crisis and the greening of the electorate in its member states.

6 Conclusions

In summary, it is essential that we recognize that ‘sustainable development’ is both a contested concept and an explicitly political one which mediates the conflict, at the global level, between the desire of the North for greater environmental protection and the desire of the South for increases in human welfare. If the contest over the meaning of the term shifts the language to ‘sustainability’ and squeezes out the social dimension, there is likely to be a backlash in the international political agenda.

Second, it has to be recognized that neither ‘sustainability’ nor ‘sustainable development’ as slogans can deliver much effective policy. As any examination of attempts to operationalise the concept clearly shows (for example: Pearce et al. 1990; Lawn 2000) there is much detail to add to make for effective outcomes. To provide this necessary detail requires the careful, critical and skeptical application of the very best that the natural and social sciences have to offer.

Sustainability, I suspect, is ultimately a journey rather than a destination. And it refers to the quest as a whole, rather than to any step along the way, so that it makes little sense to condemn any single step as ‘unsustainable’ or praise another as ‘sustainable’. Thus sustainable development might include depletion of non-renewable resources, though depletion of flow resources might be more problematic. Undertaking the journey requires not just good natural science, but also the development of good policy, and the humanities and social sciences will be indispensable in this process because it will require the application of ethical judgments, concerns with distributive justice, efficient allocation of resources, the legitimacy of decision processes, and many other processes which are the domain of such disciplines.

Sustainability without a social dimension not only excludes the poor from the equation; modern ecological theory suggests that it makes little sense to even try to talk of ‘ecological sustainability’ *except* inasmuch as the concept is concerned with the ability of ecosystems to sustain human development. ‘Nature’ will continue on its chaotic path, sustaining a multitude of changes and indifferent to the fate of humanity. Technocratic institutions not moderated by the inconvenient concerns of the *demons*—seeking equity, demanding justification—are unlikely to be any more proficient at guiding sustainability than technocratic institutions have proved to be at achieving sustainability thus far.

The engagement by business with the sustainability agenda has (unsurprisingly, given the nature of that agenda) been active. Rather than norms of ‘sustainability’ simply constraining business interests, business has sought to define the agenda to suit its interests and to serve in their defence.

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