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Sustainable What? An Overview and Assessment of "Sustainable Development"

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УСТОЙЧИВОЕ РАЗВИТИЕ: ПРОБЛЕМНОЕ ПОЛЕ ПОЛИТИЧЕСКОЙ ТЕОРИИ И ПРАКТИКИ

Sustainable development: The problem field of political theory and practice

Jeffrey K. Hass

Sustainable what? An overview and assessment of “Sustainable development”

Джеффри К. Хасс

Что устойчиво? Обзор и оценка «устойчивого развития»

Occasionally an academic term becomes a meme in broader media and popular discourse. Among such terms are “stagflation”, “globalization”, and the concept that this chapter and volume addresses: “sustainable development”. Like many other such terms, this concept implies an important subject and broad outlines of research programs and policy initiatives. Yet while provoking consideration of important and often uneasy issues, such a term can also mystify or deflects attention from other related issues. Given the clear evidence of global warming trends and the costs of environmental degradation, the eventuality of peak oil and increasing demand for increasingly scarce fossil fuels (temporarily delayed through the recent recession and discovery of Marcellus Shale deposits of natural gas), and the increasing appeal of more radical ideologies to the losers of globalization (which is starting to include the American and European middle classes), then making sense of environmentally and socially sustainable development is one of the most important issues of our day and years to come. The alternative is the risk of authoritarian politics and military adventure to guarantee control over scarce resources and to control popular outrage over inequality and unmet expectations.

Because space limitations make impossible a thorough overview of scholarship and popular discourse related to this totem, this essay has more modest goals: to provide a suggestive (and likely contentious) overview of the nature of this concept and its scholarship, and to provide some critical (and likely contentious) comments regarding how this concept has developed and how scholars (especially economists) have treated it. I focus on social science discourse and the social and political dimensions

of sustainable development policies (or lack thereof). First, scholarship in the natural sciences is sufficiently technical and often bordering or beyond the boundaries of my own competence. As well, the technical side to debates in the natural sciences about sustainable development is more objective, *relative* to discourse in the social science and the public sphere and to political decision-making¹. Second, the politics of sustainable development *policies* has dynamics that I could disentangle only in a book-length manuscript, although I will briefly refer to the more general tendencies in the policies of various countries and global institutions. Further, social science discourse is linked to political interests and ideologies, even if indirectly; for example, scholars in the tradition of mainstream economics have vested personal, professional, and likely ideological interests in demonstrating that (relatively) free markets are an optimal way to organize economic activity, and that parsimony of mathematically oriented economic theory, with its reliance on utility maximization and instrumental rationality, remains uncluttered with such complicating variables as environmental costs (externalities), political pluralism and deliberation over “social justice,” and the like.

Possible Promises: “Sustainable Development” and New “Public Goods”

While some variant of the idea of “sustainable development” goes back to antiquity, its contemporary form and sense of urgency emerged in 1987 with a report of the Brundtland Commission [27]. Set up in 1983 after more than a decade of developing environmental awareness in the West, fomented in part by politically conscious social movements critical of status quo capitalism, the World Commission on Environment and Development (also known as the Brundtland Commission) investigated threatening contradictions between an increasingly globalized economic order and increasing globalized environmental ramifications of unfettered economic development. While it did not provide much original empirical or theoretical material, the Commission’s output [29] did have one important feature: it presented a general *consensus* about a critical appraisal of the dangers of policies and trends in economic development that ignored environmental harm (globally and locally) and did little to address systemic inequality (especially poverty) and injustice. This report acted as a clarion call for political mobilization and investment in scholarship across a range of disciplines. Following the Brundtland Commission report, a global conference on ecology and economy was convened in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in 1992. One

¹ Natural scientists have no secret for discovering objective Truth, and “science” is not immune to politics and culture. However, primarily technical scholarship and debates are easier to delink from material interests and ideologies, in part because they can be more easily tested empirically.

result of that meeting, Agenda 21, called for developing policies based on three pillars that would become common for sustainable development discourse: economic growth, social equality, and environmental protection. In short, a whole set of issues were brought together as enjoined, and framed not only in utilitarian terms, but as moral imperatives significant in their own right.

The concept of sustainable development signaled *important* institutionalized recognition that the physical world could confound the hopes — or arrogance — of much reigning economic theory, in which markets and development operated according to a narrow logic of human instrumental rationality. Now, pollution and eventual depletion of natural resources would have to count as important externalities [9]. Importantly, this new discourse of sustainable development — and broader discourses of environmental and natural resource challenges on which this concept depends — implies that environmental health, social justice, and some measure of equality are public goods², rather than private resources, and not to be treated lightly.

One important outcome of the Brundtland Commission report and initial subsequent output was the implicit stress on the environment as a public good. This was not a new idea — in the classic “tragedy of the commons”, nature (in this case, pasture for grazing) was a public good, and reformers’ concerns about sewage and pollution over more than one hundred years have a similar logic. But the Brundtland Commission report expanded the scope of this idea. Now “nature” was global and multifaceted. Natural resources — especially sources of energy — were a complex, even confused, public good. Countries and corporations could own or have access to oil or other hydrocarbons, but the availability of these was of great concern to everybody. Energy oligopolies (corporations or countries) might gain massive rents from resource ownership or access, but ultimately such oligopoly now seemed to be far from Pareto-optimum. Environmental degradation was not a problem for a community, country, or set of neighboring countries; as the greenhouse effect would demonstrate, one country’s pollution could have adverse effects on everyone. The environment need not be returned to its pristine state; however, the condition of the environment and sources of energy now involved collective interests and collective well-being.

² Whether the environment and natural resources are public goods or common-pool goods remains debatable. Public goods are, in theory, non-rivalrous and non-excludable: all have access to them, and consumption by one does not deny consumption by another. Common-pool goods are rivalrous (access can be controlled), but non-excludable. Natural resources such as water are possible common-pool — any resource that can suffer the Tragedy of the Commons is more likely a common-pool resource. For the purposes of avoiding confusion, I will fold common-pool goods into “public goods” (a more well-known term); also, the issue of overuse is clearly important to sustainable development [cf. 19].

The environment as a public good might ring more hollow were it not for a second dimension to the new frame — social justice as a public good. In a market scenario, energy or resource oligopolies might lead to market imperfections, but normatively, this is a possible outcome of the market game. Markets are agnostic to “social justice” in and of itself, unless one tautologically reasons that market outcomes are naturally just because they are the outcomes of market competition. Yet the new discourse of sustainable development posited that economic policies need to address not only growing limits of natural resources and environmental degradation, which can adversely affect upper classes; sustainable development policies should also involve a new moral dimension [10. P. 877–880]. That is, sustainable development was desirable or even necessary not only for reasons of material utility; through issues of equity and social justice, it has legitimacy on its own terms (much like democracy, which ultimately cannot be sustained on the basis of material utility alone). “Justice”, as basic economic rights and access to sufficient opportunities for well-being, is not longer some utopian ideal; it is a good that can and should be shared³. This now can reinforce claims about the need to address ecological issues and natural resource availability. Environmental degradation might be bothersome to elites, but it would not jeopardize their lives. However, the problems associated with overuse of natural resources and with global warming are disproportionately felt by the world’s underprivileged. Social justice means not only that global capitalism should be fairer in the distribution of resources and opportunities, so as to reduce under privilege; it also means that the impact of environmental degradation is more than an imperfect earth — it is a challenge to basic human rights of a large number of the humanity.

In sum, issues of environment, use of natural resources (including formal and informal restrictions to access and use), and global inequality, which had been bubbling for decades in various forms and discourses, came together in the form of the new “sustainable development” concept. This was a promising approach. On the one hand, the call was clear: humanity (especially elites and consumers in developed Western countries) had to rethinking the fundamentals of their everyday economic practices, for the sake of others; likely they would have to reduce consumption and face the possibility of reducing hopes for standards of living. On the other hand, sustainable development presumed that this did not require a global revolution; this was not a clarion call for a world socialist revolution. If scientists could develop necessary technology, and if social scientists could develop concrete and useful policies, sustainable development could promise social justice, economic growth (thus

³ There is an affinity here with Rawls’ conception of justice that, for reasons of space, I cannot explore at present [21].

not only well-being but constantly improving standards of living), and a stable environment able to provide for a growing human population. Alas, as has been the case historically, the best of intentions can face seemingly intractable contradictions and challenges.

Realities of Vagueness and Contradictions

As laudable as extended attention to and discussions of sustainable development might have been (or continue to be), the concept and its discourse are not without problems and politics that could derail the concept. The cynic and the realist should have expected this. In a politics-free world, the technical dimensions of addressing environmental issues of sustainable development were daunting. Until nuclear fusion becomes feasible and humanity can replace the internal combustion engine, all other solutions are likely temporary fixes. The amount of necessary research in a number of fields would require immense investments of time and money. Yet perhaps the scientific and technological challenges of sustainable development are less difficult to surmount than the social and political obstacles, and here the very concept of sustainable development and possible public policies begin to bog down. In fact, the successful implementation of any technical advances ultimately depends on political, social, and organizational arrangements. And herein are two massive problems with sustainable development as agenda and goal — unsurprisingly, problems that most fundamental reforms of existing political economies face. First, the concept is sufficiently broad and vague as to invite competing conceptualizations of what “sustainable development” means, and requires, in the political and social realms. Second, even if a set of optimal policies could be devised and garner majority support among academics and elites, there will still be those whose interests are threatened — or who at least are too stubborn to compromise their interests (or ideologies) for the sake of implementing policies towards sustainable development. Elites and actors threatened by or hostile to sustainable development might try to hijack the concept and use it, rhetorically, as a tool to cover up relations of exploitation or hegemony — and they could even use “sustainable development” as a focus or rallying cry to organize opposition and thus defend those entrenched interests possibly threatened by reforms — much as has happened with global warming in the United States in recent years.

A vague concept. As D. Victor [28]; also J. Robinson [23]; A. Fergus and J. Rowney [8] noted, the concept remains so encompassing as to invite “wooly thinking” and adoption by groups with contradictory interests and strategies — turning the concept into little more than a façade for continuing economic exploitation and economic degradation, or a rallying cry for emotional

but not intellectual or pragmatic discourse. The key problem here is *what* sustainable development would look like: its technical and material aspects (e.g. what kinds of scientific projects optimize investment and payoff), how to obtain and direct investment for technological and institutional changes, how to distribute both burdens and benefits during the transition to new economic arrangements and thereafter, and the like. Partly this is due to the relative youth of scientific, technological, and social research into sustainable development: there are many new ideas that require fleshing out, testing, and further refinement. This is strongest for the social dimension of sustainable development: the social sciences do not have ready laboratories to test different institutional arrangements for sustainable development.

In fact, part of the problem might be the attempt to find a single form of set of policies that make up “sustainable development.” In a study of collective solutions to the overfishing of lobster, Ostrom [19. P. 10, 12–17] suggests that “most common-pool resources differ vastly from one another. Many government officials and policy analysts’ advocacy of a single idealized solution for all of these resources has been a key part of the problem instead of the solution”⁴. Policies and technologies for sustaining resource bases must take into account existing local institutions and cultures, for two reasons. First, local institutions and routines might have good stocks of “local knowledge” that scientists and policy makers far away do not necessarily have. Second, local networks and routines might be better suited to inculcate collective solutions to free riding, opportunism, and other problems of disciplining consumption and other behavior threatening sustainable development. As Charles Sabel [23] has argued in his model of “studied trust,” local networks and situations can inculcate a sense of local, collective identities and interests that can facilitate the very policies necessary for sustainable development (e.g. reduction of use of fishing stocks).

One case is intriguing in making better sense of how “sustainable development” is treated as a concept, and thus of its real power: business school discourse. Business school research and publications are not quite the same as those in the discipline of economics: research and theory tend to be applied rather than pure, and thus less weighty. One senses that business school publications are less narrow or dogmatic than much of economics

⁴ Note that this is a common criticism of neoliberal paradigms and reform policies in the 1980s and 1990s: the assumption that all economies were sufficiently similar — institutional and historical differences were marginal relative to basic human practices (a la rational choice theory) — meant that a similar set of policies could be applied to, say, Chile, Mexico, Poland, and Russia to obtain the same desired result (economic growth). The failure of neoliberalism’s “one-size-fits-all” presumption should warn us against making the same mistake regarding sustainable development as Ostrom argues [19].

writing, in part because business studies are not a discipline in the same way economics or sociology are; there is less of a canon or set of core theoretical and epistemological ideas that must be followed rigorously. At the same time, the pragmatic and applied nature of much business school research and studies means that a critical edge is lacking, in that the current state of capitalism is not seriously called into question — despite the fact that sustainable development can do precisely this (e.g. Manjengwa [15])⁵. To shed a little light into this point — and given constraints of space, I can only shed a little — let me turn briefly to a relatively early piece of business school scholarship. Shrivastava [24]⁶ asked about the relationship between corporate (or organizational) processes and procedures, and issues and policies of sustainable development. He noted, rightly, that corporate (organizational) processes and dynamics were still as well understood as they needed to be to make better sense of how corporations could address sustainable development. Yet rather than raise questions about whether sustainable development challenges fundamental assumptions about normal economic arrangements [cf. 13] — which in the post-socialist era would be global capitalism — Shrivastava does the opposite: he folds sustainable development into core business school tenets of normal organizational procedure: total quality management (which he renames “total quality environmental management”), competitive strategies that include an ecological dimension, and use of nature-swaps to encourage technological development and transfers. (A fourth facet of his proposed strategies is reducing human impact on ecosystems.) While Shrivastava is obviously concerned about environmental degradation and its risks to human well-being, his solutions are tweaking, rather than challenging, core logics of the very economic practices that got us into the problem in the first place. Interestingly, in that same year, Gladwin, Kennelly, and Krause [10], citing Shrivastava’s earlier critical work, noted how business literature on sustainable development had become fragmented, and as a result different themes and issues were dissociated. Organizational studies in business school literature separated ethical from technical analyses, separated humanity from nature (a “technocentric” paradigm), and tended to frame the value of economies and human activity

⁵ However, British business school research can have a more critical character, especially those studies stressing discourse and power. American business school publications are more applied, thus less critical, relatively speaking. This naturally affects how business school faculty approach “sustainable development” — not as a critical concept or as an opportunity for critical appraisal of existing economies, but rather as a *challenge* within existing institutions.

⁶ This article has been cited nearly 700 times — a healthy respect in academic discourse. This was not Shrivastava’s only article on business and the environment that frames this important con-temporary issue in traditional (contemporary) business concepts [cf. 25].

in terms of quantitatively measured material growth [10. P. 882–886]. (Alas, alternative paradigms have their own weaknesses)⁷.

There is one troublesome side to the whole idea of “sustainable development”: “development for whom” (or “for what”)? The mantra of neoliberal economic policy was that “a rising tide lifts all boats” — but as billionaire Warren Buffet noted, some boats left the dock while others stayed in place (or even sank). The whole concept of “sustainable development” presumes something should be sustained, and the original Brundtland Commission concept was that social equality was a central pillar to the whole project. However, not long after the report of the Brundtland Commission, Lélé [14] noted that “sustainable development” had become a nearly vacuous phrase, as disparate scholars and agencies applied it without putting much effort into rigorous definitions, analysis, and policy formulation. Also, scholars in different disciplines weighed in, contributing to a fracturing of scholarly discourse and thus of the concept itself: natural scientists focused on ecological and biological processes and contexts, while social scientists focused on social and organizational.

Within the social sciences, a split emerged between economists and other scholars, especially regarding role and naturalness (or inevitability) of markets and even skepticism about whether sustainable development is worth attention. Monetarist’ and neoliberals’ attacks on Keynesian economics in the 1970s — relatively successful in popular and political discourse and in mainstream economics, although less successful in the rest of the social sciences—meant that markets seemed not only natural and unavoidable; they were the solution to social ills, not the problem. Once American and British economies had escaped stagflation under Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher — and the Soviet economy began its tailspin into the dustbin of history — it seemed that this narrative of human economic history was correct: only markets (assumed to be self-regulating) could be trusted to provide the most ethical and efficient solutions to humanity’s challenges. If market forces were supposed to improve life for domestic economies, then why would it not do so for the global economy — not only for global inequality and injustice, but also for environmental challenges? In fact, libertarianism inherent in much mainstream economic theory could be used to deny that sustainable development has any legitimacy.

In fact, pseudo-libertarianism of much Anglo-American public discourse discounts the legitimacy of debates about inequality and social justice: the only real justice is the freedom of every individual to pursue his or her own

⁷“Ecocentrism” — according to which (among other themes) nature is fragile and humans and nature have a symbiotic relationship — cannot address issues of human security; likely this is due to the paradigm dethroning *homo sapiens* from its position of superior status in nature. The “sustaincentric” paradigm strikes a middle ground; humans are embedded in nature but are cen-tral figures in that relationship.

interests given his or her own talents and resource endowments⁸. For example, Beckerman's [3] critique of sustainable development is entirely couched in the narrow logic of mainstream economics. As a result, in this process he entirely misses real ecological forces that the Brundtland Commission (and many scholars outside economics, especially in the natural sciences) had been drawing attention to. As Friend [9] and Padilla [20] note in two forceful critiques, economists and those drawing on mainstream economic theory tend to base analyses and claims on narrow and artificial structuring of "rights" and narrow (possibly mistaken) beliefs that economic processes are the equivalent of natural laws⁹. That is, "sustainable development" since the late 1980s is not a mere technical issue of how to fulfill utility; it requires a rethinking of how our economies should be organized. Yet this faces head-on a Panglossian logic of neoclassical economic theory – that we must live in the best of all possible institutional worlds (or, following the market, are headed in that direction).

In sum, different disciplines or other social groups interpret issues and promises of sustainable development—or its obfuscations (according to some economists) – according to their domain assumptions, identities, and interests. Small surprise that the result has been debate over what "sustainable development" is; but the result is a continuing lack of clarity due to the participation of different voices, and even different paradigms [10]. It might be that vagueness from cacophony ultimately is due to the second problem: the lack of a hegemonic actor or discourse to impose that conceptual clarity, and with it, clear policies.

Contentious implementation. A second problem with the institutionalization of sustainable development policies is *implementation*: who implements such policies, and how, and how to support sustainable development against possible attempts to defect from new agreements or to use the system opportunistically. This relates to a classical problem of reforms, namely, who has or should have the power to do so, without such power risking an erosion of rights or generating opposition. This is similar to the biggest problem facing coherent global policies to counter global warming: attempts to regulate economic and political gain inevitably run into resistance from well-connected

⁸ Ayn Rand's influence is noticeable in some of conservative discourse in the United States. How Rand and "Randians" would address the possible catastrophes of global warming is beyond me, but I do not profess any sympathy for Rand's philosophy or the claims of those profess to be in-spired by her writings.

⁹ This is a typical trap of reification that American economists often fall into. Ironically, this pro-fession was profoundly shaken by the 2008 crisis yet often unable to admit (even to themselves) how much economic theory and economists played a role in that crisis. (Keynesianists were somewhat vindicated in their criticisms of free-market monetarism, but most Keynesianists did not propose a fundamental rethinking of economic theory or existing economic institutions).

with entrenched interests threatened by said reforms. More implicit in debates over sustainable development are issues about who decides on proper policies and carries them out. In the absence of a global philosopher king, this might be more problematic than just what kinds of goals are ethical and necessary and what kinds of policies are optimal towards reaching those goals.

A central problem is institutional. A centralized state with sufficient power can implement fundamental reforms in integrated national societies; but the world-system is the focus for sustainable development, as environmental degradation and use of finite natural resources cross political and social boundaries. Here sustainable development potentially faces the same problem as earlier hopes for combating nuclear proliferation: the lack of a global government able to overcome national free riding¹⁰. Sustainable development will require initial sacrifices, but in the absence of a global hegemon, those sacrifices can only be implemented through a series of treaties and complex enforcement mechanisms. Organizing such agreements and enforcement mechanisms (monitoring, punishment, etc.) is possible, but getting electorates and elites to surrender sovereignty is a difficult challenge — as supporters of the European Union continue to face¹¹.

In fact, the challenges of sustainable development are similar to those of welfare capitalism, in that the demands of capitalist accumulation of profit and redistribution of wealth and rights are potentially contradictory¹². In the twentieth century, state leaders were caught between the demands of capitalist elites (fewer regulations, more profit) and the greater number of less-well-off employees (more regulation, redistribution of wealth and rights). In the new millennium — as potential environmental problems have become clearer and the growth of human population does threaten some Malthusian fate — state leaders are caught in a similar bind, between saving environments and saving economies [18], both of which ultimately are important for political power, let alone social survival. Sneddon, Howarth, and Norgaard

¹⁰ The growth of pseudo-libertarian ideologies since the 1970s, much through the spread of neo-liberalism, has made it difficult to argue for global mechanisms for implementing sustainable development. One creed of neoliberalism is that markets (or market elites), left alone, will find solutions to nagging problems because markets clear (in theory — although persistent unemployment suggests that in practice markets do not clear so easily or often).

¹¹ A counter-example of success is the World Trade Organization, but one could argue that this is really a pact between various elites who stand to gain from inclusion (or lose from exclusion). Given the less than democratic nature of market economies, entry into the WTO faces fewer hurdles — especially as policy-making sovereignty is less threatened or curtailed in the process.

¹² Contradictions between accumulation and redistribution can be mediated by general wealth — there is enough money for profit *and* redistribution — but history has revealed that capitalism has inherent cycles of “boom and bust,” meaning that such contradictions are always ready to reemerge if structural conditions are right.

[26. P. 256–257] point out that governments have not made great progress with environmentally progressive legislation — the “sustainable” part of sustainable development — in part because of changes in governance (e.g. the rise of the development-oriented but less environmentally conscious WTO; one could add the globalization of capital flows and markets) and the rise of competing discourses less concerned with social and ecological sustainability (e.g. fundamentalist movements, including climate change skepticism in Western right-wing movements). This author has seen conferences and panel discussions dedicated to sustainable development in oil-rich post-Soviet countries (e.g. Kazakhstan) in which the concept was little more than window-dressing to make investment in hydrocarbon extraction seem legitimate and politically palatable.

Further, there is no clear and *empirically verified* sure-fire method for implementing such policies. The collapse of Soviet socialism and problems with welfare in Western economies have soured many academics, politicians, and citizens on the efficacy and desirability of states leading the way and imposing reform on potentially recalcitrant citizens; populist movements that once called for activists states now might call for states to withdraw. Neoliberal rhetoric — even propaganda — over the last thirty years have made many civilians wary that state elites are not the most competent of reformers. State elites can implement good long-term policies that encourage growth — and they can also make bad decisions because of incompetence, short-sightedness, and corruption [12]. But at the same time, the recent crisis of global capitalism, and especially of the dominant Anglo-American version of free markets, has revealed that markets don’t always get things right either — and might be just as deadly as states.

Yet elites might not be the only groups skeptical or secretly hostile to sustainable development. Some non-elites might share opposition to such regulation of capitalism because they, too, see either their interests or some political ethics or ideology, with which they strongly identify, threatened as well. In a situation similar to that of the Prisoners’ Dilemma, convincing a large number of countries’ elites and citizens to forego immediate benefits of economic growth and to sacrifice for a transition to more ecologically friendly and socially fair policies — all in the absence of some overarching power like a world government — would require that enough countries are able to overcome individual short-term interests for the sake of collective longer-term interests. Where monitoring and sanction are possible, the Prisoners’ Dilemma can be overcome; but the global polity does not have sufficiently powerful monitoring and sanctioning mechanisms, especially to shape the behavior of the great powers.

Conclusion: Promises and Challenges of the Concept “Sustainable development”

That “sustainable development” has become a widespread phrase, used not only by various academics (social and natural scientists alike, politicians, various reform social movements) speaks to the legitimacy and importance of the concept. Words are one thing — but deeds are another. Despite the emergence of sustainable development discourse in business school literature and even in formal business strategies, too often these are superficial applications of possible strategies. While academics and pundits have called for corporations to take sustainable development and environmental concerns seriously in their core strategies, there has been still little real corporate innovation among American firms fifteen years after the original Brundtland Commission report [2]¹³. Just what “sustainable development” is and entails remains both vague and contentious, in part because members of different disciplines contribute different ideas (economic, social, ecological, technological) — although as Fergus and Rowney [8] noted, this could encourage some debate between different camps as well as complicate serious policy efforts — and in part because myriad groups hijacked this phrase — e.g. left-leaning, environmentally friendly social movements, and corporations likely eager to promote a socially responsible image that might or might not conform to real strategies of corporate growth [28]. This has only contributed both to vagueness and contention around the concept.

Humanity might not face extinction from continuing current economic practices and heedlessly using up earth’s resources and damaging its environment. Large numbers of non-elites will suffer, but elites likely will be able to weather the storm, and it is unclear to what extent today’s elites are concerned with sustainable development — unless the incentive is to corner the market in “green technologies” to gain future political advantage. Welfare policies saw success when organized non-elites (e.g. working classes organized through trade unions and social democratic parties) found common cause with a faction of the elite (a socially conscious *intelligentsia* or state technocracy) and could force the elite to submit to regulation. Since the 1970s, elites (especially financial elites) have seen their power grow at the expense of states and non-elite populations. Transforming “sustainable development”

¹³ Bansal claims that American corporate managers saw little real net gain from adopting new ISO standards compatible with “sustainable development,” in part because there were no clear *institutionalized* procedures to which firms could orient. Further, state oversight of existing regulations was not sufficiently coherent or effective. Again, the issue of enforcement looms.

into a real, fundamental set of policies will require more than scientists and engineers developing fusion or new industrial processes; it will also require other scholars overcoming the hegemony of laissez-faire market capitalism, and non-elites organizing to overcome the hegemony of economic elites. This is not impossible, but it is daunting. And for the sake of future generations, it is a concept worth developing and fighting for.

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