

WORKSHOP PAPERS

for

Local & Sustainable

Workshop Leader - Ed Echlin

List of Papers

01. Local & Sustainable <i>by Ed Echlin</i>	1000 words	6/2001
02. The Great Food Swap & The Raised Bed <i>by Ed Echlin</i>	1500 words	6/2001
03. The Local Way compiled <i>by Barbara Panval</i>	4000 words	6/2001
04. Size Does Matter <i>by Chris Wright</i>	1700 words	7/2001
05. The Age of Community <i>by Chris Wright</i>	2200 words	7/2001
06. Com-Unity <i>by Jim Scott</i>	1500 words	7/2001
07. Mystical Reform of Democracy <i>by Mark Barrett</i>	1500 words	7/2001
08. Science of Prayer & Meditation <i>by Dorothy Forster</i>	1500 words	8/2001

Prepared for 'The Radical Consultation'

by

CESC

31st August 2001

Local and Sustainable by Edward P. Echlin

Sustainable and local cohere. Sustainable is local.

Before discussing sustainable 'relocalization', a brief reinterrogation of the now widely received 'sustainable development' is useful.

A major contributor, surely, was Gifford Pinchot, arguably the first trained American forester, whose influence on Presidents and policies at the turn of the twentieth century was immense, as the western frontier closed forever. Never before, nor since, has humanity had such technological power over so vast and relatively unspoiled a bioregion as the US at the end of the nineteenth century. 'Conservation' said, Pinchot, 'means the ownership, control, development processing, distribution and use of national resources for the benefit of people'.

For our purposes, note the word 'development'. John Muir disagreed, arguing that other beings are valuable in themselves, 'regardless of their use to man'. But, fatefully for the future of the earth, Pinchot prevailed. His attitudes influence virtually all societies, and sustainable development, today.

After the Second World War, Harry Truman, impressed by the success of the 'Marshall Plan', argued that 'western style development' by all peoples would secure the peace. A rival of Truman, although more aware of environmental damage in developed societies, especially in his native California, Richard M. Nixon, nevertheless, agreed, 'the nation that went to the moon in peace for all mankind is ready to share its technology in peace with its nearest neighbours.'

Sustainable, derived from the Latin *subtenere* (to support indefinitely), was linked with development in a *World Conservation Strategy* (19??) However, sustainable development became famous, and part of our culture, in *Our Common Future*, the Brundtland Report of 198?, and the Rio Earth Summit of 1992. *Our Common Future's* famous definition was, 'Sustainable development meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.' It guides us still.

Unfortunately sustainable development, as the late Dick Richardson noticed, is 'a political fudge'. Anyone genuinely committed to 'our common future' recognises the long dark tail of an oxymoron. Sustainable development is a Trojan horse, a contradiction in concepts.

Our contemporaries have responded to sustainable development in one of four ways, all familiar to the earth literate readers of this page!

First, treadmill sustainable development. This is the way of the 'global climate coalition', the present American President, the WTO, the privatizers, great food swappers, mega airlines, and their compliant politician executives.

Second, modified sustainable development, which recognises that there is a fragile earth out (or down) there, but is prepared only to tinker around the edges. This is the sustainable development of the hydrogen cars, the solar powered airplanes, eco-tourism, the TNCs know best. Some would put Forum for the Future here, the '*Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA)*', '*UNED-UK*', and the '*UN*'.

Third, soft sustainable development. This approach is definitely worried, really cares about the earth community, and our common future, and, within limits, is prepared to sacrifice. In brief, it wants to retain 'the present system, with its infrastructures, hoping, to quote a well meaning Shell executive, 'we can have economic growth and care for the environment at the same time'. Examples would be some (too few?) local councils, some businesses, large organic farmers, car sharing schemes, park and ride -- the list is long, and there's a lot to be said for soft sustainable development

But does any sustainable development go far enough? People differ here.

The only way I can live is with a fourth way which is not sustainable development at all, but idealised sustainable development, or in other words, sustainable sufficiency. What sustainable sufficiency means differs in different localities. But it always means quality of life, and earth, and not quantity of money and own things, it means living as lightly on the earth as possible, so that we leave the local earth, entrusted to our use and care, at least as healthy as we found it.

Among many other practices, sustainable sufficiency always includes local food, some grown by ourselves, possibly in a 3ft x 20ft raised bed, possibly communally, possible with a large garden, holding, or allotment. What we cannot produce ourselves we purchase, or barter, from local growers. When buying those few items we need from abroad, buy only fair-traded.

Wendell Berry suggests six ways to walk our food talk:

- 1) produce what local food you can -- hence our raised bed;
- 2) buy food from as close to home as possible;
- 3) deal directly with local growers, when possible;
- 4) learn about intensive agribusiness;
- 5) learn about sustainable food production;
- 6) try to know the histories of the plants and animals you eat.

Similar to Wendell Berry, 'Christian Ecology Link's' 'LOAF' principles are right on: **L**ocally produced, **O**rganically grown, **A**nimal friendly, **F**airly traded.

Locally produced food means shorter journeys for farm animals to markets and abattoirs, less climate damaging food miles, less lorry traffic, less demand for new roads, support for the local economy and local farmers, and regional variety.

Organically grown food avoids the use of synthetic pesticides and herbicides. Organic cultivation leads to healthier soil with more organic material, micro-organisms and other wildlife, and no genetically mutilated organisms released into the countryside.

Animal friendly means that our fellow creatures are treated humanely. Organically reared animals are subject to strict welfare regulations, as are the animals sold with the RSPCA freedom foods symbol. Free range eggs and meat are now readily available, sometimes even from (what about this?) supermarkets? Even confined pigs in the UK are kept in better conditions than in many other countries.

Fairly traded coffee, tea, and other foods which have to be imported, ensure that workers get a fair wage. Also UK farmers get a fair deal when competing with imports from countries with low wages and poor animal welfare.

Over to discussion.

The Great Food Swap and the Raised Bed by Edward P. Echlin

Ralph Nader was right that the 2001 American presidency would alarm a lot of previously complacent people. Sensing themselves being taken over - or perhaps, better, occupied - by globalising corporations, more people now ask what they can *do*. How preserve the environment from corporations which prey upon people by preying upon the earth? How secure a future for children?

Recently, an urban social worker with ethnic groups, asked me, after a lecture on local sustainability, if individuals in cities, desperately trying to live sustainably, really could make a difference in the face of the corporate juggernaut. I replied, with Cyrano de Bergerac, that 'one does not fight merely to win'.

Moreover, I am convinced that individuals *do* make a difference, by every effort, no matter how small, to live locally, which is to say, sustainably.

Communities blossom when as many of us as possible tend at least one 3ft x 20ft raised vegetable bed. By 'us' I include people in flats, able to manage a bed in communal gardens, or at church, school, place of work, or in a neighbour's garden. Some people even grow fruit and vegetables on rooftops.

No matter where we live, we generate valuable kitchen compost, and can scrounge organic litter from the streets. In embargoed Havana, and in Shanghai, banana and apple peels are treasured.

No one is suggesting that a few raised beds will make a neighbourhood self sufficient in vegetables, or halt the corporate seed shedders. But every bit *does* help. A lot of beds together add up to an equivalent intensely cultivated organic holding. And from July to October our small bed returns our care a dozen fold. If we can spare a foot or two for a kale, sprout, or broccoli, it will supplement some winter meals too.

An intensely cultivated bed is a wonderful place to educate children. You can learn and teach everything from astronomy to biology to literature there. Compost, for example, illustrates the teeming circle which is life on earth. And it's a fine symbol of the mysterious transformation to new creation, which is resurrection.

Having found a 3x20 place in the sun, wide enough to garden intensively without stepping onto the bed, dig it, at least one, and preferably two spades deep. Take care not to mix top with subsoil. Before replacing a row of topsoil (about a spade's width at a time) flip in a few pebbles or twigs for drainage, especially if the soil is heavy, or clay like mine. And whether heavy, or loam, sandy, or shingly, dig in plenty of rotted organic matter as you go, (almost anything that's lived). It's amazing what a small bed will absorb.

That's the last time you (or your more supple digger) need to dig that bed. Thereafter just put well rotted organic matter on top. The worms and micro-organisms will take it into the soil, doing your digging for you.

I load my beds with compost, some of it only partly decomposed, in autumn. By spring it resembles a well worn hall carpet, so diligently have our soil comrades worked. Leave weeds alone until late winter. They work for us too, preventing nutrients from washing away, fixing nitrogen in the soil, keeping the bed porous, and bringing up friendly minerals. In late winter fork them in with a hand fork, as green manure.

Obviously, we can't grow all we'd like, in just one bed. Some will dig a second, or third, or more. My point is that almost everyone can find space for at least *one*. That bed puts us into the productive section of the food chain. Better to dig one bed (and buy local organic) than curse the hauliers.

Mix summer vegetables with winter. You might even plant a fruit on the northern edge...perhaps a gooseberry, or an upright pear. England used to be pear paradise. Even the horses awaited a windfall binge at perry time. Then the globalizers, with predatory local developers, ripped up the orchards.

In 1997 the UK imported 107,000 tons of chemical pears, mainly '*English style Conference*', 72,000 tons of which were from beyond the '*EU*'. Yet my own cordon pears, on an east facing wall, and the few remaining pear orchards here in the southeast, demonstrate that this island could easily be pear self-sufficient again. Importing pears into the West Country is one paradigm of fossil fuel guzzling, polluting, climate bashing, food miles. And there are myriads more.

It's wise to rotate vegetables, even on a small bed. Grow beans where there were brassicas, for example. And move onions, tomatoes, and potatoes around. What you don't eat goes into the compost and returns, decomposed into humus, into the soil from which it springs.

A beautiful circle which reduces the need for landfill, especially since you can add an occasional bit of waste paper or cardboard to the compost. You can supplement your compost from many sources: green grocers, farmers' markets, neighbours' grass cuttings, local seaweed from the beach. Some of your own kitchen waste will come from your veggie box.

One small bed, integrated with one veggie box, illustrates how we *do matter* to the food chain.

Wendell Berry suggests six ways to walk our food talk:

- 1) produce what local food you can -- hence our raised bed;
- 2) buy food from as close to home as possible;
- 3) deal directly with local growers, when possible;
- 4) learn about intensive agribusiness;
- 5) learn about sustainable food production;
- 6) try to know the histories of the plants and animals you eat.

Berry's wisdom contrasts with the arguments I heard recently from a globalising economist who has travelled widely, representing a major oil company. I remarked how foolish Britain and Ireland are to make themselves dependant on food produced beyond their borders, and that local food self sufficiency seemed the only sensible way to secure these islands' future. My economist friend replied that in 'an increasingly competitive world' I was talking nonsense. Food miles, he said, were really a good thing.

The food swap meant not dependence, but 'complementarity'. That is, we export meat to Germany, they export potatoes to us. Therefore, (in an economocentric world), we're not mutually dependant, but complementary. Our exports to them complement theirs to us. Besides, he added, we weren't even self sufficient in the 'dig for victory' years, and we are (here, at least, he is right), more overpopulated now than then, and we have fastened thousands of houses on agricultural land.

3x20 beds, veggie boxes, and organic food from health food shops and supermarkets, are all right for hobbyists and alternative eccentrics, but in 'the real world', anyone who thinks their bed means much is benighted. Needless to say the food swap is good for petrochemical companies.

It is worth detailing such globalized economics, because it is helpful getting into the minds of the globalizers. Few, if any, of the big ones have ever worked, intimately, with their hands, in the soil. During the *'Rio Earth Summit'*, Paul Ehrlich remarked that 'no-one but an idiot or an economist believes that every nation could become a net exporter.'

Proponents of the great food swap are oblivious of the loss of taste in food, harvested when unripe, ripening with refrigeration and gases and preservatives, in transit. They dismiss the cruelty inherent in transporting sentient animals to distant slaughter, the shedding of tasty varieties of food (including animals) for 'tough' food that travels well in bumpy rides, runways, and roundabouts, and stays fit on supermarket shelves.

The food swap demands earth and climate bashing infrastructures, especially motorways and runways, obligingly provided by tame transport ministers, and subsidised by taxes. Foreign food dependence, far from being 'complementary', is fossil fuel dependence. Disruption of *food* supplies, including hoarding, starvation, and food riots, because of *fuel* disruption, is waiting to happen.

The food swap means submission to profit driven *'TNCs'*, instead of one's own garden, seeds, neighbouring farmers, fields and animals. Finally, those of us, including TNC economists, who live in the UK and Ireland, are singularly vulnerable in the *'EU'*, if we are not at least partly self-sufficient in food.

For unlike Germany with its many land neighbours and borders, Britain, and Ireland are *islands*, without contiguous borders, fields, or orchards, but only the emptying sea with its dwindling marine life.

The *'WTO'*, and many in the *'National Farmers' Union'*, want more 'liberalised' trade in food. That means they want to industrialise and monocrop the hills and fields, permitting only isolated 'conservation areas' and 'environmentally sensitive' parkland, for the rest of the earth community. Above all, they want to 'liberalise', that is, abolish, local environmental and local agricultural protection, for what agro-scientist Harvey Krato calls, 'an increasingly complex and technologically dependant socio-economic lifestyle'.

Yet the best, perhaps only, way to conserve the hills and fields, waters and woodland, the whole countryside, is through extensive, sustainable, organic horticulture by farming families. An organic farm holding, with its wondrous biodiversity, *is* the premier conservation area, the alternative wilderness, and place for silence, people need and seek.

In Barbara Ward's words, 'If somewhere in his world, man leaves a place for silence, he will find the wilderness a great teacher of that planetary modesty man most needs, if his human order is to survive'.

We appreciate genuine farmers more when we produce some local food of our own. Our raised bed *genuinely* 'complements' local farmers and growers. Whether we tend one raised bed, or three allotments, we are at best partly self-sufficient. And that's a good way to be, in solidarity with local farmers, who fill our veggie boxes, health food shops, and some supermarket organic shelves.

Together we are *really* self sufficient in food.

The Local Way Forward: individual voices compiled by Barbara Panvel

People from many walks of life have contributed to this list, including businessmen, authors, editors, journalists, two former nuclear physicists, academics, organic food growers, a zoologist, a doctor, a Harvard trained economist, a former UNESCO adviser, teachers, a peace researcher, a banker, a Harvard economist, a former bishop, a film-maker, a linguist, a food scientist, a permaculturist, EC consultants, an MP, a bookseller and an agricultural scientist. I have not included individual 'track records' because the intention is to focus on their message, not the messenger

Disclaimer: inclusion in this list does not necessarily imply agreement with other opinions expressed by contributors or approval of all their activities.

Adrian Cadbury says that social exclusion is very much a local matter and local bodies are the best way to tackle the problem

Aidan Rankin sees globalisation and political correctness as two sides of the same coin, riding roughshod over local economies and cultures. Both impose abstract dogmas of economic growth and 'universal rights', which in practice diminish individuals and impoverish communities. Respect for local traditions and histories should therefore accompany a shift towards local production for local need. Localisation means discarding one-size-fits-all political programmes and valuing cultural diversity as much as biodiversity. Green politics is therefore as much conservative as radical.

Allan Pond writes about 'ecological Englishness', which is an appreciation of nature, a feeling for the local, the unique and the distinctive . . . Central to this is the idea that our desire to conserve flows naturally from familiarity with an identifiable and known part of it. Though we do go outside it, in our backyard is the beginning of wisdom.

Andrew Rigby writes: Sustainability requires that we organise our societies so that they evolve in harmony with nature ... (and) calls for a significant reduction in use of global resources and a sharing of these resources between individuals, societies and generations so that a maximum of well-being and dignity is achieved for all . . . The values and criteria that should inform any development process seeking sustainability: protecting the integrity of the biosphere, efficient use of resources, self-reliance, participatory democracy, fair trade, peace and nonviolence.

Andrew Rowell believes that with prevailing economic systems in various degrees of disarray . . . It is clear now that both capitalism and socialism, in all their experimental forms, have failed to create ecologically sustainable economies . . . Local empowerment rather than global repression has to be the way forward.

Andrew Wood asks: isn't international trade inherently undesirable in terms of sustainability, involving movements of goods over great distances? Should we not be encouraging local and regional economies instead ?

Anthony Giddens agreed with the following 'sentiments': I think security requires the building up of rural and urban local economies. Cannot this co-exist with the corporate presence? Could the ultimate vision incline to the local provision of universal goods - food, clothing, shelter - with international trade only in surpluses and luxuries? This would have obvious environmental and social benefits.

Arundhati Roy asserts that the only alternative can be local - decentralised economics, decentralised control; handing some measure of power back to the people it affects. Unless that happens, however far into the information age 3% of the population goes, they're always going to be pulled back by what they're doing to everyone else. Its direction must be one which India's people choose for themselves, and which reflects the realities with which people have always lived - realities fashioned by everyday existence, by community life and by the patterns of nature. The alternative is there for all to see, in the increasingly atomised, mechanised and disconnected West.

Bernward Geier proposes a strategy to strengthen local and regional food supply, shifting consumption patterns towards sustainable societies

Bill Clarke writes: I see regionalism as the political arm of the alternative movement. Unless we can build up a strong demand for devolution of powers from Whitehall and Westminster and eventually achieve autonomous regions, and empower the people of the regions, the centralized elites will obstruct many of the other alternative proposals -- in economics, the environment and social matters - all in order to protect the status quo from which they derive their power.

Caroline Spelman: I think localism is a great idea, but just look at what Ford are now doing with Land Rover, glass from Brazil, gearboxes from Sweden! Big business is promiscuous.

Colin Hines presents an optimistic alternative . . . that everything that could be produced within a nation or region should be . . . a redirection of trade and aid . . . to help the rebuilding of local economies, rather than international competition

David Boyle advocates a local currency to boost the local economy and a time currency to support the social economy - the crucial transactions that build families and neighbourhoods and look after old people

David Fleming advocates that alternative economic structures can be built which are capable of coping with the new conditions as they develop . . . new systems should be built alongside (the market economy) in ways which are complementary with it, supporting it while at the same time starting to build the foundations of something radically new. The rule is: destroy nothing; build, invent, improvise to respond to the new stimulus whose nature is now clearly evident. Local, small-scale lean production technologies and skills can be built - now; lean distribution systems can be developed - now. Energy systems, water conservation, the first steps in urban food production, small-scale secondary production and services for local use, local decision-making - it is these fundamentally creative initiatives which should be the basis of local developments today . . .

David Jenkins expresses a determination to re-assert democratic political control over markets and 'to recover powers and possibilities for people locally, for this is how the vast majority of human beings in the world live'.

Dilafuz Williams has studied the work of people who are taking steps to shape a culture that is more responsive to the needs of human beings and the requirements of natural systems. She is involved with offering children from a wide range of social & ethnic backgrounds an ecological education which emphasises the inescapable embeddedness of human beings in natural systems.

Edward Goldsmith writes that the sort of economy we require – the one that is most consistent with the other changes required to solve our problems and maximise human welfare - is not a global economy but a loose network of local economies.

Ernest Bader furthered the causes of peace, co-operative working and the application of trusteeship principles. In his biography we learn that Gandhi had several lessons for Ernest: the basis of national life, for example, should be a small community, so that politics were local and vital and there could be economic freedom and full personal responsibility.

George Monbiot makes specific recommendations, including the closing of the most damaging out-of-town supermarkets or their transformation into covered farmers' markets, in which local producers could sell directly to local consumers. He notes that while governments have been attempting to engineer a single, harmonized global trading system, throughout Europe and the United States citizens' groups are breaking the market up. Organic box schemes and local farmers' markets have begun to restore some balance to commercial encounters, reducing the scale of business until the power of producers and consumers is roughly equivalent, introducing accountability to the food chain, curbing the environmental impacts of production and transport.

Georges Drouet writes that as our world system is becoming so complex, decision-making levels will have to be kept close to people's hand. The representative power of the elected people is directly linked with the feeling of the elector that he could meet, if necessary, his representative. It's then obvious that as far the decision level is from the inhabitant of a town or a village, the less he would be interested in political matters. Decision levels should be determined in such a way as to be as close as possible with people, only matters requiring large perspectives should be left to supranational and worldwide entities, but always under a democratic control.

George Paxton writes that it is good to see so much support for localisation. Things are slowly beginning to happen.

G.R. Parsons sees the prime requirement for . . . a sustained set of industries in a localised area, which people know will stay in the long term . . . those jobs which come with good schools, libraries, clinics, shops.

Guy Watson who sells his produce locally through a box scheme, declares that it is not just 'safe', but delicious, nutritious and is supporting local people and wildlife.

Hamish Macrae once wrote that the counter-argument . . . that for all countries to strive to be net exporters is self-defeating and ridiculous. Strong domestic consumption has sustained the recovery while Continental economies have faltered . . . relying on domestic consumption to sustain demand is in some ways a safer strategy, than relying on exports, where the growth of demand for your products is beyond your control . . .

Helena Norberg-Hodge says: What we should be doing - without retreating into cultural or economic isolationism – is to nourish the traditions of our own region and lobby for a reduction in unnecessary trade. By reducing and eliminating subsidies for transportation, we would cut waste and pollution and strengthen communities in one fell swoop - reinforcing and diversifying local economies. This shift in direction would produce multiple benefits: creating jobs, reducing long-distance transport by shortening the links between producer and consumer, and rebuilding community by reconnecting people to each other and to their environment.

Hilary Wilson writes I should like to see all countries being self-sufficient in their own basic foods and fibres. It seems to me responsible living.

James Bruges believes that the community, at the scale of the street or village, must be empowered to make the decisions that vitally affect them. Gandhi advocated this as the basis of democracy and his thinking should be re-evaluated.

James Robertson supports a more decentralised economy - as in "The Sane Alternative", 1983. "The SHE (sane, humane, ecological) economic path will aim to develop greater local economic autonomy. This will involve more local production to meet local needs, including more locally produced food and energy for local consumption - creating local opportunities for work, and circulating money locally instead of being spent elsewhere. It will encourage local, small-scale ways of organising work - a bigger role for small businesses, local co-operatives, and community enterprises."

Jerry Mander advocates a far more diversified, locally controlled, community-based economics that will emphasise revitalisation of local communities by promoting maximum self-reliance, economic and political control and environmental sustainability; he urges an emphasis on the use of local resources for local production and consumption to better balance between local commerce and long-distance trade, recycling all types of wastes

Jeremy Seabrook writes: to reunite consumers with producers; to devolve the growing of food to the most local unit; to retrieve clothing from the global manufacturers in their infernal sweatshops, is part of the same process that will also take back our capacity to amuse delight and entertain each other from the monstrous products of transnational entertainment conglomerates . . . Here is a real popular movement in the making; not in theory, not some isolated project in a corner of some distant country.

John Bunzl believes that comprehensive localisation of economic activity can no longer be achieved by local or unilateral national action alone. Today's global economy has diminished the ability of nations to act to protect their societies and environments from supra-national economic forces which now appear beyond their control. Global and simultaneous legislative action by all nation states is now required to overcome the fears and dangers of capital and corporate flight which would inevitably be faced by any nation or group of nations seeking to implement localisation policies unilaterally.

John Madeley, in his latest book, asks: Will free trade in food help the millions of poor people who are currently malnourished? Will free trade help huge numbers of small farmers find new markets in the North? Or will it in fact eliminate them even from their local market place? Is it really irrational for countries to protect their rural communities and farmers, and ensure significant self- sufficiency in food production?

John Papworth writes: If power were in the hands of the citizen and used by the citizen to shape and determine the local pattern of citizen life, then that is nothing less than democracy in action

Jules Pretty points out that a significant amount of the food imported could be produced or processed locally, Why import lettuces, spinach and apples in autumn and summer when they could be grown equally well locally?

Julian Rose expounds the proximity principle: to minimise the impact of transport and pollution and to ensure freshness and nutritional quality, growing and supplying food from the nearest productive land should be the primary aim . . . we need to move away from our current dependency on finite fossil fuels, drawing energy requirements from sustainable local resources: a combination of biomass, methane, solar and windpower . . . job creation is an important part of the proximity principle; jobs that can fulfil human creative potential. Fabric and fibre can also be extensively produced at the community level. In the last century, the market town of Burfield in Oxfordshire, was completely self sufficient in food, fibre, fuel and fabric. Local communities can produce their own food, fabrics and energy – government policies should encourage regeneration of regional economies.

Manfred Max-Neef advocates ‘human-scale development’, urging that development be directed towards present and future generations. He has written, 'It is only by generating self-reliance ... that it is possible to promote development processes with synergic effects that satisfy fundamental human needs. We understand self-reliance in terms of a horizontal interdependence ...

Mark Kinzley writes that economic devolution is the rejection of economies of scale and of the principle of Comparative Advantage. It is production within a region to meet its needs, by means of maximum diversity of production. Looking at a specific company, the length of its supply routes for materials would be shortened to within its region. Its markets also would have shrunk mainly to its region. Political power is the exercise of decision-taking. In order to manage the economy decisions have to be taken where the economy is . . . if the economy was devolved to the regions, political power would have to follow it . . .

Mike Rowbotham condemns the trafficking back and forth across the globe of products that could easily be grown or manufactured locally. He has been working with a group resisting the incursion of supermarkets in the nearby town of Sheringham in Norfolk, saying that they destroy four eco-systems, those of the town centre; the poor countries growing the produce; our own neglected fields and bankrupt farmers and the one we all share.

Nandini Joshi has come to an analysis of future development (which) sees the contemporary mass-scale and machine-centred industrial structure as unsustainable. It also fails to deliver equitable economic prosperity. In place of this socially, economically and environmentally damaging structure, therefore, a strategy for shifting from the present system of mass production for global markets, to one of local production for local markets is advocated.

Nicholas Gillett believes that increasing wealth in industrial countries and the need for a mobile labour force has dehumanised children and adults. The lack of local roots needs to be addressed by schools if anomie and alienation are to be avoided – a danger rated by Johan Galtung as serious a threat as nuclear war. The question is, how to bind television-dazed children to the natural environment, when their eyes are trained to see shops and advertisements.

Patrick Whitefield writes: only by reconnecting ourselves with our local resources can we move towards a sustainable society - developing communities which are self-reliant. This is not the same as total self-sufficiency; there will always be a need for some trade with other communities and other parts of the world. Self-reliant communities are ones where producing goods locally for local needs is the norm rather than the exception, where travel outside the community is a pleasure rather than a daily economic necessity . . . this means putting power in the hands of the people rather than national or multinational organisations . . . not power over anyone else but the power to decide how to run our lives.

Paul Kingsnorth, reports the complaint of Trevor Manuel, chairman of the Prague 2000 conference "I know what they're against but I have no sense of what they're for" and advises him to listen to the International Forum on Globalisation's workable proposals for regulating international trade . . . and shifting the focus to promoting the local economy.

Richard Booth produces forceful and lucid arguments in favour of genuine local democracy, and is addressing what people are doing to survive in a rural community. . . thinking that the future lies in local produce and traditional skills and arguing against chemical agriculture, factory farming, supermarket food and big business

Richard Douthwaite suggests that each community should set out to build its own local economy. Drawing on the experiences of a wide range of communities which have already achieved greater self-reliance, he shows how local currencies and local banking systems can be developed to create a financial micro-climate in which a wide range of local production for local use becomes possible - including energy and food. In such a local economy, trading with the outside world will not be out of necessity but purely to give a wider choice.

Richard Swift advocates the replacing of our passive consumer democracy with a reinvigorated polity, in which as many decisions as possible are kept in the local arena. A lot of people stubbornly cling to the idea that democracy means that they should get to decide . . . people who won't let them close the local school, let a developer put in a new road, rally to the defence of a besieged park, prevent the abuse of the local eco-system by industrial dumping.

Roger Murray advocates the development of a regional strategy, including: a publicly owned regional bank and an elected regional assembly; developing better public transport and encouraging people to live nearer their jobs. Specifically this means regeneration of the inner cities in terms of housing, education and security; redeveloping brown-field sites and maintaining (expanding) the green belt; diversifying the economy of the region and increasing "resourcing" within the region.

Roger Scruton writes that a genuine free market exists only at the local level. Once you establish distribution systems which reach out indefinitely and which are also publicly maintained . . . you condemn all those who cannot externalise their costs – among whom small farmers are the most prominent – to extinction.

Ruth Potts sees that there is an emerging movement towards local food, local money and local trade – but how do we pull it together into one voice?

Steven Gorelick refers to regulatory frameworks, laws and rules drawn up for the benefit of large-scale producers, and the general presumption against small-scale rural production by most modern governments. He continues: What is needed, then, is a series of policy changes at top level

Steve Walker sees the movement to use socially directed investment to achieve social change, which begun in the early '80s, gathering momentum. As he explains: local community finance initiatives give a real opportunity for people to invest in their own back yard.

Stuart Parkinson is working on a paper called: 'Prospects for the Localisation of UK Food Production' using MAFF agricultural statistics and the UK food survey data.

Subhash Sule prescribes that if we are to become truly independent, we must operate OUTSIDE the system itself . . . All we need to do is to exercise our inalienable right NOT TO BUY. No one - no advertisement agency, no communication medium, no government, no police force, no army, can force us to buy what we decide not to. We need to start moving immediately to a non-fossil fuelled economy, with just alternatives worked out in fair detail and maybe even put in place. This will require changing the whole range of products we use now, dropping some of them entirely, modifying others to more sustainable manufacturing methods. Products presently made using fossil fuels and fossil minerals will need to be replaced by hydrocarbon-based items produced by photosynthesis. A carbohydrate economy will be dependent on plants to fix the energy of the sun, converting it into thousands of chemicals which will not only supply us with food and fuel, but also with other basic necessities, and hundreds of other domestic and industrial items.

Sue Riddlestone focusses on fibre: Local production for local needs is the 'green' ideal. As a move to a sustainable future, we envisage regional growing of flax and hemp, with the crop processed at the local processing plant into fibre, ready for spinning and weaving into cloth. The waste fibres and hemp core would then be sent to local paper pulping plant to be mixed with locally collected waste paper or straw pulp, to produce the paper we need.

Ted Dunn writes: the near impossibility of providing the necessary degree of public transport currently required, and the relationship of transport to trade and globalisation, demands a radical reappraisal of our way of life, drastically reducing our need to travel and send goods from one end of the earth to the other at such great expense. The long-term answer must be to encourage much more local self-sufficiency, resolving our domestic transport situation and providing the answer to the WTO's attempts to regulate trade. It would reduce pollution, encourage local democracy, and reduce local and international conflict. The proposed international tax on fuel would discourage transport and encourage more self-sufficiency while at the same time providing the UN with the resources to undertake all the desperately needed humanitarian tasks assigned to it.

Tracy Worcester writes that many people from so called underdeveloped cultures value nature, land, community, democracy, human scale, self-reliance, liberty and spirituality. So called developed cultures are trapped in a downward spiral of increasing stress, loneliness, poor health, greed, crime and debt. The solution is to shift development from global dependence on distant banks and companies to the local interdependence - still experienced by those as yet untouched by the corporate propaganda machine.

Vandana Shiva advocates relocalisation everywhere – in the South and in the North – would conserve resources, generate meaningful work, fulfil basic needs and strengthen economic and political democracy. I hope that the people of the North will bring about movements for self-rule and localisation, so that we can all shape our economies, political systems and resource-use patterns to provide for our own needs, together.

Walden Bello believes that the domestic economy should be ‘deglobalised’ by looking to local resources and local markets instead of export-led growth.

Winin Pereira strove to realise a vision that will at least give humankind a future in which to continue the search for a more just world. He believed that social justice and environmental sustainability requires, as a general rule, that local people make and repair artefacts using materials available in their village or region. Essential needs would have to be catered for, perhaps not in every village, but in increasing circles of self-reliance.

Wolfgang Sachs worked with two others on ‘Greening the North’. Relevant passages include: the industrialized countries are already paying a high price for one-sided orientation towards growth, globalization, and acceleration in their economic and political policies. The price paid ranges from environmental degradation to all kinds of illness, from disorientation to the fragmentation of society, from meaninglessness to increased violence. Social resources are also being eroded together with nature. This question is posed in the book: If the affluent really want to become good global neighbours, they will have to set out to build economies which weigh much less heavily on the planet and on other nations . . . What is necessary for achieving a healthy economy, allowing as many people as possible to provide for themselves?

Zac Goldsmith asserts that the only answer is to devolve political and economic power to the local level, where the people themselves can decide how to use it . . . everything which can be localised, should be. (Local people) can, and should, decide what is bought, what is sold, what is taught to their children and how they want to run their lives. Hand the power back to the people and we will see a rebirth of local character and genuine democracy – rather than the sham we now have.

Size Does Matter by Chris Wright

Common sense and experience both suggest that the future is inherently unpredictable - which doesn't stop us being confident that tomorrow will be the same as today, consulting our horoscopes, or making detailed plans on an individual, national or even global basis.

The problem is the sheer complexity of everyday life. We may feel that we increasingly understand the elements of existence, particularly those that relate to the physical world and its functioning but, put them all together, and we are literally unable to get our heads around the endless possibilities.

Predicting the weather is the classic example of how difficult it is to be certain about how a system will behave even when the basic building blocks are well understood. It is now accepted that, even with computers many times more powerful than those available today, there will always be a margin of error, growing exponentially bigger the further into the future we attempt to look.

Put another way round, our ability to tell whether it will be raining in five minutes time will be good, reasonable for the next twenty four hours or so; beyond that, forget it. It is a level of prediction that is hardly more successful than an experienced observer - at least as far as the weather in their immediate area is concerned.

And therein lies crux of the problem. We have long since abandoned localised prediction, seeking to know instead, not only the forecast for the whole of the United Kingdom, but what we can expect all over the world; just in case we are planning our holidays in South Africa or Asia in the next few days.

It is the same with our social 'forecasts'. Policy makers are no longer interested in making decisions that will effect the inhabitants of the '*Ancoats region*' of Manchester or Trent Bridge in Nottingham; they are happily enacting legislation (social prediction based on a belief that the proposed measures will achieve certain outcomes) that covers the nation.

It pays to think big. The '*European Parliament*' regularly introduces rules and regulation that will apply to all its 375 million citizens (a number soon to be increased by the inclusion of the Central European nations). What this approach fails to appreciate is that, like the weather, any dynamic system can be thrown completely off course once even a small deviations from the expected occurs; the bigger and more complex the system, the more likely such divergences become. And you can't get much more complicated than a social organisation the size of Europe or the United States.

Chaos theory offers a mathematical model of why this should be.

Firstly, unless you deal in whole numbers, all computation involves approximation. At some point, rounding up becomes necessary and, once that occurs, the possibility of error has been introduced; error that can grow and become magnified until what the mathematics is telling you should happen and what is happening in practice are poles apart. Prediction has failed to deliver.

Because they deal with what is simple and ordered in nature (the relationship between the pressure, temperature and volume of a gas, for example), most scientific formulae are not adversely effected by this inbuilt tendency towards inaccuracy. Once you deal with the complex and disordered, however, it is only a matter of time before the wheels come off even the best engineered of machines.

The second reason why chaos (i.e. unpredictability) is the inevitable partner of complexity is the possibility of random events; once again, a factor that increases the greater the number of elements there are and the more they interact with one another.

Random events are, by their nature, unpredictable - like the driver who changes lanes on a crowded but smooth flowing motorway and brings the whole thing to a standstill. In this instance the unpredictable behaviour becomes so routine that it is accepted as inevitable and one is mildly surprised when a journey passes without such an event. Where and when it will happen remains unforeseeable, however, and the police can only wait and respond to the more serious and long-lasting incidents.

It is easy to see the same processes at work in non-mathematical settings. Because it is an approximation, everyday language is wonderfully flexible and offers an almost infinite range of creative possibilities. This virtue, however, becomes a liability when it comes to framing legislation. The words become difficult to pin down and, in the attempt, the law either ossifies in bureaucratic interpretation and form filling, or is easily subverted. Either way, the effects (usually negative) were not anticipated, and soon leads to demands for more effective policing, the closure of loop holes and the legal 'reforms' needed to achieve these goals.

It is an endless cycle and, on current evidence, seems destined to bring more and more of everyday life within the orbit of the law. And all because we can't see the inevitable consequences of approximating in complex situations.

For the impact of the random event, one need look no further than the so called London Nail Bomber who believed he would be the spark that ignited a race war. Fortunately, he was deluded in every sense of the word but, despite the almost miraculous homogeneity and apparent predictability of humanity in the mass, there are always individuals and groups who, at any one time, are acting against the prevailing mood. Whether it be people ignoring or 'misinterpreting' the law, or campaigns fighting actively against it, the effect is usually marginal, a bit like an itch on the national skin.

Every once in a while, however, the irritation erupts. People and campaigns are thrust into the limelight and assume a symbolic importance as issues, real or imagined, are elevated to the level of national scandals. The world is changed and, while one might argue that it would have happened sooner or later, that is difficult to demonstrate in practice, and how the problem actually emerges will often dictate how it is dealt with; the event and its outcome are both inherently unpredictable.

So, is there no point in trying to anticipate and plan for the future?

Accepting chaos theory as a way of looking at complexity doesn't imply a lack of order. On the contrary, it suggests that reality is firmly grounded in order, but it is an order that cannot be tied down in a conventional sense. To return to our weather analogy, Constable painted clouds so accurately that today's meteorologists can identify the actual weather patterns he was looking at. By their very nature, however, the pictures can only hint at the dynamic movement that, in matter of seconds and minutes, would have left the scene completely transformed.

Except in the simplest and most controlled of experiments our way of looking at any situation - making sense of it - is a simplification that inevitably unravels as soon as any of the dimensions that have been excluded from the equation begin to assert themselves, time being the most obvious.

It is a start to recognise this limitation because the humility it implies is strikingly absent from the certainty with which most political initiatives are announced. More circumspection, rather than less, is called for, which is obviously difficult in a political system built on polarised positions. A consensual approach that emphasises the positive reasons for taking action, but also recognises the dangers, would be more appropriate.

More fundamentally, however, the concept of 'social' chaos suggests that, like the weather, we need to be much clearer about the circumstances in which prediction is both valuable and valid. A simple principle immediately suggests itself; the closer the circumstances we are anticipating are to present events the more likely we are to be right. I am more likely to know what I myself am going to be doing in five minutes than trying to predict what someone I've never met will be doing in a fortnight. From this perspective, the attempt to plan legislation two, five or even ten years into the future that can be applied to the varied circumstances of many millions of people seems inherently flawed.

Secondly, we need to be flexible enough to be able to change tack if circumstances suggest that our original predictions were wrong. To persist with a barbecue in pouring rain just because the weather forecast assured us it would be hot and sunny would be viewed as highly eccentric behaviour, and yet our cumbersome legislative and political machines produce some uncanny resemblances to just that scenario.

Feedback loops in nature are the way organisms adjust to changing conditions and, once again, the more immediate they are the more likely the animal is to adopt an appropriate strategy.

The implications of these insights appear to be leading us in a consistent direction, small groupings of individuals who are in touch with one another and what is going on around them, and who can respond quickly and positively to any changes that occur in their social environment.

Size is critical. Too small and the group may not have the resources to meet the challenge, too big and there is the danger of incoherence. The answer lies in trying to get the best of both worlds, the adaptability of the small, the strength of the large. An organic analogy points the way ahead.

Our bodies provide an example of a fully functioning, complex system. It is, in fact, a series of systems within systems, from cells to complete organs, which interrelate to produce the most complex being our world has ever known. It is self-regulating and repairing, and is capable of truly amazing feats of physical and mental coordination.

It can adapt to a wide variety of situations and is remarkably resilient. Moreover, the well being of the whole depends on the well being of each individual part. In that sense, one function cannot be said to be superior to, or to control, another.

The contrast with our existing social arrangements is stark. Regulation and repair is imposed from above, there are no inbuilt mechanisms for coordination, adaptation is at best slow and ponderous, and there is no obvious link between the health of the parts and the whole. It is also evident where power lies.

To emphasise the point, human consciousness functions without knowing what the heart and muscles are actually doing; it assumes that they will respond to the need to run. Only if something goes wrong does an audit become necessary to determine whether ill health or lack of fitness is to blame and what steps might be necessary to remedy the situation.

In other words, a system isn't a random set of events, but neither is it dominated by a relentlessly vigilant centre. That balance between order and chaos is critical in maintaining effective routine functioning *and* responding to rapidly changing and unpredictable events. It is a form of creative imbalance, order always on the edge of falling into chaos.

That is the political agenda of the twenty first century, to find ways of encouraging people to take responsibility for their lives, freeing them up to respond creatively to the inherent uncertainty of life, while at the same time creating those larger structures that will provide both the coherence within which the individual sub-systems can flourish and a safety net when things don't work out.

Be warned, the consequences of setting out on this journey are likely to be unpredictable!

The Age of Community by Chris Wright

The Radical Consultation is an opportunity to reflect on the future and how we might bring it about.

In that context, I think it is worth reminding ourselves that the future is a foreign country and that, despite the ubiquitous package tour, no one has ever been there. In other words, a certain humility should inform our debate. There are as many views about the future as there are people on the planet and they can't all be right.

Optimists, for example, know that we live in the most successful civilisation of all time and that science and technology will fix every problem: pessimists, on the other hand, are equally certain that we have already entered the end game, with our planet polluted beyond recovery. I would guess that most of those attending the event will be somewhere between optimistic pessimists and pessimistic optimists. We will be united by a recognition that the way things are cannot go on indefinitely and that to do something about it requires a major shift in the way we think and act. But we could be wrong.

If we can't know the future we can be sure of one thing, that change will be a more or less constant feature. And change means there are even fewer signposts to the future than usual. It is precisely in such times that we must be true to ourselves and search within for the route to follow. The problem with such a heartfelt approach is that it can all too easily flip into dogma and a belief that if only everyone could see the world through our eyes it would be a better place - we alone are right.

But the other feature of change is that we can be fairly sure that the future, whatever it is, will be different from the way any of us hope or imagine. It seems to me that, in those circumstances, we must link endorsing our own integrity, our belief in what is right, with a willingness to listen to other people's 'truth'. That requires an openness to, and trust in, a process that allows for entirely new possibilities to emerge from the knowledge and experience that each of us holds. We are *all* going to have to change and probably no more so than at the beginning of the journey, when we have the most invested in our own ideas of what is best. The more energy we can channel into working together to achieve a *joint* view of the way forward (i.e. one that isn't dependent on the input of a single individual or group) the more likely it is to be one that sees the light of day.

So where does 'community' fit against this backdrop? In one sense, the process I have just described is one of coming together 'in community', achieving a shared vision of the future by being open and honest with one another and evolving towards a new truth that wasn't available *until* we came together. But that is only part of the picture.

For me 'community' is a metaphor for a way of living that is very different from the way we live now. What do I mean by that? Well, each age is often described in a kind of shorthand - the age of capital, for example, summons images of the primacy of the market place, of profit and entrepreneurship, of technological advance and mass production; the age of monarchy - the nation state, divine right, high art and magnificent palaces.

Each age was infinitely complex, but we use simple word pictures to evoke their key characteristics. And there is no reason why the future should be any different. 'Community' can stand for the attributes that we believe are necessary to rescue the world from its current, headlong dash.

On the face of it, the word doesn't sound a very likely candidate as a defining concept for a new age - if only because no one is entirely clear about what it means. That is one of its great advantages; it is a word waiting to be born, still pregnant with possibility. And any significant change has to have new words to describe it; otherwise it remains essentially the past by another name.

Part of our task is to find new meanings for old words, to recycle and reinvent until we have achieved a clarity that creates a momentum of its own, that allows our thinking to take off and become common property. The energy that such a collective view of the future would release could in itself transform the world.

A second advantage that 'community' offers is its all-embracing nature. Precisely because it focuses on the nature of the relationships between its members, it holds out an umbrella beneath which most other issues can be accommodated. Getting those relationships 'right' will be fundamental to changing the way the world works.

We may have to adopt radically new technological and attitudinal approaches to our environment but, unless we can remove the unthinking exploitation of one person by another that lies at the heart of the money economy, we will be whistling in the wind.

The same applies to education, work, politics and power; unless they grow out of a re-evaluation of who we are as individuals and how we relate to those around us, we will discover that it is just the same old product repackaged. Each age has sets of relationships that are characteristic to it and from which all else emerges. Significant change requires an entirely new set of ways of relating to one another.

Our relationships with others always start with ourselves, who we are and who we perceive ourselves to be. A Roman patrician and a slave would relate on a clear understanding of power. So who we are determines the set of relationships we will develop around us. And that, in turn, will influence our attitudes to the environment we share. Lavish entertainments (bread and circuses) became daily fare in Rome and it didn't matter who or what was sacrificed to ensure that the show went on; that was someone else's problem.

How we view ourselves, how we relate to those around us and the environment we inhabit are framed by our views on the mystery of ultimate meaning - how we explain our world and our place within it, which in turn either reinforces or questions our view of who we think we are: the cycle is complete, we are back where we started, with ourselves. To the Roman noble the answer to the question 'why Rome' was simple, it was favoured by the Gods, its primacy was self evident; and in offering the possibility of freedom to its slaves, the Empire also ensured that those at the other end of the social spectrum had some investment in that view as well. For centuries, Rome was essentially a closed system.

The greater the coherence between these four key dimensions, the lower the impetus for change. Where transformation does occur, however, it is rarely through dramatic switches in behaviours or beliefs. More usual is an unfolding of the discontinuities in the system - who we believe ourselves to be no longer being reflected quite so clearly in the relationships around us, the way we see the environment being used no longer quite satisfying us, or our explanations of the meaning of life no longer ringing quite so true. Instead of constantly reinforcing our sense of who we are, each cycle raises questions and we have the opportunity to change. The closed system opens out to become a spiral with each turn moving us further onwards and upwards. For a while, the potential is only limited by our ability to recognise it.

We appear to be at such a point today. As individuals we feel increasingly isolated and insecure, our relationships are fragmented and short lived, we recognise that the environment is in danger and the conventional materialism that underpins our scientific explanations of the world we inhabit no longer convinces.

Something has to change. And, of course, it is us who will have to change. We cannot rely on governments or institutions who essentially try to manage the status quo. It is down to each of us and, insofar as we are prepared to think and act differently- perhaps only marginally at first - the cumulative effect can be radical.

To illustrate the nature and extent of the changes that are required (and which, incidentally, begin to stake out the territory that will have to be claimed in the name of 'community') I have selected a number phrases to illustrate some characteristics of life today and set them alongside their opposites to show how unbalanced contemporary society is. The aim is not to swap polarities, one extreme for another, but to suggest where a new balance point might be found.

Emphasises Procedures	Emphasises Relationships
Relationships based on Contract	Relationships based on Covenant
Relationships based on Suspicion	Relationships based on Trust
Relationships based on Power	Relationships based on Mutuality
Authority based on Position and Hierarchy	Authority based on Consensus and Personal Qualities
Primacy of rules/the Law	Primacy of Negotiation
Global Orientation	Local Orientation
Assumes Conflict	Assumes Co-operation
Emphasises Rights	Emphasises Responsibilities
Emphasises Uniformity	Emphasises Difference

By exploring the meaning of these pairs of opposites and where the balance lies in our own lives we will begin to change the nature of the relationships with those around us.

That, in turn, will impact on our view of both how we relate to the environment we share in common and the mystery of ultimate meaning by which we understand the world we inhabit. Further changes in how we view ourselves will become inevitable. We may just be on the way to discovering what 'community' means.

One final thought, I can set out on that journey but I won't get far without you. It is essentially a collective enterprise and we can only discover what 'community' has to offer together. I don't have the answers, but neither do you. That means rolling up our sleeves and doing things together in local communities, beginning to take responsibility for all aspects of our lives and ensuring that we can see the impact we are having on each other and the land that supports us. Only in that way will we begin to share and evolve a common language that will, in turn, make it easier to push on into the unknown.

We may be part of many other 'communities' (communities of interest, even virtual communities) but, if we are honest about the importance of the relationships around us and the environment we share, we must commit ourselves to a 'home' that is firmly rooted in time and space, with both a past and a future. Small, local communities will provide a completely new set of meanings to life, and the relationships between such groupings and the wider world will determine how successful we are in creating a way of living that future generations will see as having value and honour.

Apart from supporting this Radical Review, where do we start?

We start where we are today as individuals. We get to know our neighbours and our neighbourhoods; we get involved in what is going on, and think of ways of making things that don't appear to be going on happen. Information is critical and setting up or joining a street/locality web site could provide anything from local news and notice boards to the exchange of unwanted items and interactive discussion groups. Using local facilities wherever possible; not just local shops and businesses, but local people with skills that compliment yours, will strengthen local relationships.

Joining local currency systems will also facilitate such local interactions and, if local authorities and housing associations can be persuaded to collect a proportion of their rents in local currency, they can provide a medium through which local environments can be maintained, using local people and addressing local priorities.

Thinking of resources - such as community workshops and neighbourhood heating schemes - that would benefit your community is the first step towards organising to achieve them. Supporting local decision making bodies, however superficial their powers may appear to be, begins to give people a sense of being in control of their lives and can provide a platform for filling the vacuum that currently exists at the community level. People can come together and begin to change things for the better.

Above all, think local, plan local, act local, get involved. Welcome to the Age of Community.

Com-Unity by Jim Scott

Community is essentially about values because, based on its original derived meaning, 'com' *together* and 'unity', it is intrinsically about cohesion, integration etc., and therefore has to be understood and cultivated holistically. To speak about localities as 'communities' is a shorthand, and frequently a euphemism, which presumes them to be unified, cohesive and integrated, which closer inspection often reveals to be far from true.

Disunity as a Cause of the Global Crisis

Lack of unity lies at the root of the Global Crisis, since it is brought about by considerations of separateness of human beings from:

- our biological support systems and the interdependence of all species and their habitat;
- other members of our own species, which is made a justification for gross disparities of wealth, access to, exploitation, patenting and pollution of common resources;
- other cultures and nations, which is made a justification for ideological differences - rendering others 'wrong' and therefore OK to ignore, neglect, exploit, oppress, attack and even 'ethnically cleanse';
- other sections of our own societies, which is made a justification for entrenched prejudices, economic and social advantage and exclusion, political 'sleaze' and 'spin', undeclared vested interests, lobbying and corporate manipulation of the democratic processes, and lack of real caring for the well-being of other social groups;
- our localities, neighbourhoods, neighbours and colleagues at work, which is made a justification for carelessness and unconcern for the services provided by local authorities and other service providers, crime, poverty and homelessness suffered by others, disinterest in local democracy, the state of the local environment and amenities, neglect of the well-being of those with whom we are casually acquainted, and 'office politics', 'back-stabbing' and 'empire building at work';
- members of our own households and families, which is made a justification for family feuds, cruelty, 'scap-goating', emotional manipulation, disrespect and hostility;
- ourselves, expressed in unworthiness, low self-esteem, ill-health, egoism, pretence, blocked emotions, and inconsistencies between thought, feeling, speech and action.

The Realisation of Unity

Union and love are the opposite of considerations of separateness. Hence, the main problem to be overcome is the misuse of the mind. This is an educational problem in the broadest sense, whether it be approached personally, in informal group studies and practices, or through a formal educational system. However, it can only be taught by those who not only understand but *experience* their unity with everyone and everything around them.

The gaining of such understanding and experience takes many years and some people say that it is the main purpose for human life on earth. Some cultures have historically supported these attributes more than others. A part of the Global Crisis appears to be due to the increasingly predominant western ideology of separateness undermining the unitive values of those cultures, by offering new horizons of personal convenience, standards of material living and wealth.

A more positive sign is the increasing availability of the wisdom and insights from those unitive cultures throughout the world, through publication, audio and video recordings, the Internet and training opportunities, including by satellite transmissions. One of the most familiar systems throughout the world is the Indian practice of yoga, which both means 'union' and the path or practices that lead to the realisation of unity. One of the best-known aphorisms, by Patanjali, states that 'yoga is the stilling of the modifications of the mind'. There are many other complementary systems, mostly deriving from cultures in the eastern hemisphere of the world.

Facilitation of Com-unity

The Global Crisis is too urgent to await the outcome of such long-term educational understandings and experiences. They have to be, and, to an extent, *are* being pursued alongside practical action, by a hopefully increasing proportion of the population.

Some people say that the Crisis is not purely destructive, but a very severe case of purgation, purification and transformation in which the old order of many centuries, if not the present civilisation itself, is crumbling and giving way to a new emerging one, based on a recognition of love and unity behind everything.

A belief in such a view may provide some faith and encouragement, but concordance with it requires much the same action for those who believe otherwise. The action, which is needed, is unifying for all the levels, dimensions or 'dynamics' of life which were covered in the first section above. With the possible exception of the personal sphere...and even here a form of 'coming together' of fragmented parts of the personality may still apply...the action needed involves people acting together in com-unity (community).

So, what will facilitate 'unity together', from the viewpoint of the individual, or 'collective unity', from the social or sociological viewpoint? It is easiest and recommended to consider this from the smallest scale, outwards from the individual, for several reasons:

- Firstly, although pursued alongside practical action, the *perspective* of the unity of everyone and everything needs always to inform action, and this can only be maintained by the individual.
- Secondly, the congruity between principle and action can best be maintained at the small scale where least expertise is required and deceit is most easily exposed.
- Thirdly, adjustment and direction are most easily effected by those nearest to hand, where the rewards for separatist greed and ambition are least enticing, and so is the most locally democratic and accountable.

At the level of the small group or neighbourhood (since manifestations of separateness at the family or household level do not appear to demand public action) the facilitation of com-unity needs to be considered in the following linked respects:

- physical - design and planning;
- ergonomic and economic - practical living;
- sociological - neighbouring and social relationships
- psychological, cultural and ethical - feelings, attitudes and values
- philosophical - view of the world.

These can be viewed as layers of an onion, revealing the one below progressively as one becomes familiar with a place and its people.

It is suggested that the more cohesive and integrated are these respects in any particular instance (place), both separately and in combination, the stronger the com-unity or community present. Where the small group is non-place centred, such as a professional, trade or ethnic group, it can still exhibit com-unity though lacking number 1 of the above levels or dimensions.

If a typical unified physical design can be taken to be houses surrounding a shared open space, which can be used and managed by the residents (thereby linking levels 1, 2 & 3), they need to be compatible (unified) in income, employment, sociability and values (levels 2-5) if the outcome is to be community and not disunity - just to demonstrate, superficially, how an assessment of community might be made. Once the progress of time is taken into account, it all gets a lot more complicated and interesting.

Policies, Organisational Structures & Implementation

Having dealt with the theoretical parameters of community, we can now consider the kinds of policies, which are consistent with the perspective of the unity of everyone and everything, that can be applied to neighbourhoods, localities and then the larger scale.

A number of suggestions follow which may serve as starting points for discussion:

- All policies must be based on respect for every person and support for their right to exist, unconditionally.
- All decisions must be made as close to the point of need as possible, with structures designed to support this principle and to correct its abuse.
- New residents of housing projects must be given real choice of accommodation, including in the public sector, and choice of how they use their accommodation, through adaptable design.
- New housing projects must be built on 'brownfield' sites, at reasonably high density in order to preserve nature, and contain a proportion of affordable accommodation (according to local need) with security of tenure for their occupants.
- Large new housing projects and existing neighbourhoods must provide opportunities for residents to meet and support one another, and for facilities to satisfy daily needs for food and other services, within walking distance of home.
- The known future residents of redevelopment and refurbishment projects must be consulted on their design and other needs, and given the opportunity, where possible, of being rehoused close to their previous locations and to maintain neighbouring connections.

The Holistic Reform of Democracy by Mark Barrett

"The solution is evolution." Barbara Marx Hubbard

"The world view implied by modern physics is inconsistent with our present society, which does not reflect the harmonious interrelatedness we observe in nature. To achieve such a state of dynamic balance, a radically different social and economic structure will be needed: a cultural revolution in the true sense of the word. The survival of our whole civilisation may depend on whether we can bring about such a change." Fritjof Capra

"We have it within our power to begin the world again." Thomas Paine

I believe that:

1. We are witnessing a whole system crisis; therefore we need a whole system response, a reformation that manifests itself as both a 'top-down' and 'bottom-up' phenomenon.
2. We need a great simplification, an enlightened sea change in our culture. We need multilateral institutional reform so that environmental, social and spiritual justice is served on all levels of our society. The reform should be fiscally led, and constitutionally based, so that all our institutions are made to serve holistic values.

I have drafted this discussion paper in order to argue the above. I have emphasised below the top-down reform of the economic system and the bottom-up reform of our education system, but the principles would apply to all institutions, public and private. They would manifest differently in each case.

1. Democracy Isn't Working – the Need for Reform

"Politics have gotten more and more ugly because finally the strongest ideas of the 20th century have all ended in disaster and the great belief that democracy and capitalism are bona fide goods will probably end with the idea that everybody will go ass over tea kettle for democracy." Norman Mailer

Those who believe in democracy are often unaware that they place their faith in a paradoxical idea. Democracy holds two principles sacred, and they are frequently found to be at loggerheads. These are:

1. the freedom (or will) of the individual; and
2. the will of the people (as a whole), as represented by the elected government, or state.

"There's no longer any countervailing power in Washington. Business is in complete control of the machinery of government."

Robert Reich (outgoing Labour Secretary of State in the Clinton administration)

At present, democracy is corrupted because our elected leaders represent established non-accountable interests who will not support the radical changes that are now needed for the good of the nation. Instead, these interests desire the maintenance of a status quo that lines the pockets of the richest few and contributes to great social oppression and environmental degradation the world over.

The state has become corrupted by 'factional self-interest' (in short egoism, greed and private profit), and consequently politicians are held in contempt by most people, who see them, unsurprisingly, as a self-serving and undeservedly privileged elite. It is undeniable that the political establishment sets the people a poor example to follow.

"What is justice? To put something in its correct place. What is injustice? To put something in the wrong place." Jalaluddin Rumi

If we, as a people, can come to an agreement on what values our culture is most lacking, and on the need for institutional reform, we can then come together and democratically institutionalise these values, for the sake of all our futures. Once our core values are in place and made effective, the tension between the will of the people and the will of the individual will become a positive creative force, and our political culture a container within which great things can unfold. The freedom enjoyed by individuals will become an enlightened freedom.

What are the informally institutionalised values that presently guide us? What holistic values should we formally replace them with? If the reform is done correctly, these values will in the future affect individual behaviour (for the good) in a similar manner to the 'strange attractor' phenomenon that we find in biological systems. Or we might choose to see it working like a magic wand held by an invisible conductor in an orchestral performance, in which we, the people, are the star performers:

"Not the autocracy of a single stubborn melody on the one hand, nor the anarchy of unchecked noise on the other, no, a delicate balance between the two, an enlightened freedom." JS Bach

'Autocracy' means the few speaking to the many. In a modern democracy, the people, though ultimately free, are guided (consciously or otherwise) by the values, ideas and beliefs (or melodies) that are handed down to them by the various elite powers that reign in the culture in which they live.

As it is the state that is primarily responsible for the kind of melody that we are being made to dance to, and because the values that are guiding us are all the wrong ones (be greedy! consume! look after number one! be successful at all costs!) it is surely time that we exercised our democratic rights and ensured that the state changes the tune.

"The importance of ideas, beliefs and values cannot be overestimated, once an idea has gripped the masses it becomes a material force, it can lead to a change in material life. The ruling elite in society controls ideas, beliefs and values." Johnny Spencer

We should begin by recognising that, at present, much of the 'guidance' that we are receiving is (ultimately) coming from huge multinational corporations, through (amongst other things) the media and various corporate governmental puppets, so it is their damaging agenda that we are being made to dance to.

Sadly, we are a nation enslaved to the most powerfully addictive guiding force that humanity has ever created, 'consumer capitalism'. We should then look at what we might replace the institutionalised values of the corporate consumer capitalist agenda with, and see if we can come to some consensus upon which to act.

To summarise, I am suggesting that:

1. we recognise that in a democracy there is this tension, this dance of power, between the freedom of the individual and the need for a guiding authority;
2. we recognise that the values that we are currently being guided by are false, non-holistic and consequently very damaging; and
3. we work determinedly to find a consensus on what holistic values to place and make effective at the heart of our new constitution.

2. Human-scale solutions

"Our age has its own particular mission... the creation of a civilisation founded upon the spiritual nature of work." Simone Weil

A human scale response to the global crisis means that the solutions we all yearn for will be solved predominantly by human goodwill, creativity and action appropriately directed. If the 'top-down' framework in which we live is reconstituted according to holistic values, and at the same time is effective, strong, flexible and truly democratic, I believe that we will see human scale solutions to global/local problems naturally bubble up from the grassroots, because the creative genius of the human individual will be nurtured, supported and empowered.

As I suggested above, these values will operate like the 'strange attractor' phenomenon. In all natural systems, including human teams/communities, patterns of behaviour are constrained and guided by strange attractors. A strong vision placed at the centre of our constitution will allow individual creativity to flourish while acting as a natural constraint to behaviour detrimental to the well being of society.

Nature works in this way; it self-organises into a pattern within an underlying theme. Natural systems have an unusual flexibility; they are inherently adaptable and multifaceted. The strange attractor prevents the system as a whole from straying past certain boundaries.

Our behaviour will tend to circle round the attractor, but the relationship is not a rigid one, so there will remain a great degree of freedom for the individual and the community to innovate and experiment in order to find new and novel ways to honour the attractor. We must not allow our reforms to stifle innovation, rather it must be encouraged within a holistically-ethical framework.

I propose that we adopt these holistic and universal values: soul, soil, society

In the future, within a reformed democratic framework, if individuals and human associations were encouraged, financially and otherwise, to honour these three universal human values, a new kind of civilisation would grow, organically, from the ashes of the old. This new embryonic civilisation, created here in Europe, would be an example to the world. More on these three values below.

As I mentioned above, I will focus on the effects of these reforms on two aspects of our culture that are of major concern, the education of our children and the future of the economic system.

A gradual, gentle introduction of reform – this is NOT the French Revolution!

“A new society emerges when and if a structural transformation can be observed in the relationships of production, in the relationships of power, and in the relationships of experience. The major advances in civilisation are processes that all but wreck the societies in which they occur.” Johnny Spencer

So, please let’s not throw the baby out with the bathwater. Let us work within and outside of the system, but let us transform it, steadily and surely, at the same time.

“Growing civilisations display endless variety and versatility. In decline or disintegration they show uniformity and lack of inventiveness. This loss of flexibility is accompanied by a general loss of harmony among its elements, which leads to social discord and disruption.” Toynbee

Flexibility is key. It is not necessarily helpful to have a blueprint for how society should look or behave in the future, all this does is create utopian, unrealistic expectation. In fact, better to recognise that the transformation we are seeking in individuals and in society is a fundamentally mysterious process. For this reason it is wise to remember that we will need to go through a period of relative uncertainty and even hardship in order for our culture to rise phoenix-like from the ashes. Transformation is rarely a painless process. These radical reforms should therefore be phased in gradually; so as to allow our corporations and other institutions to adapt accordingly with the minimum painful upheaval for the people involved.

Educational (bottom-up) reform, on the other hand, must take place swiftly. This will mean that by the time the (top-down) phasing in process reaches completion, we will have a highly attuned and motivated group of individuals leaving school in time to take up the challenge that they will face in making these values work in our society.

3. The Reform of Education – putting our children’s deepest needs first

‘Education’ from the Latin ‘educare’ – to draw out what is already latent within

“Teach us to delight in the simple things.” Rudyard Kipling

“Your work is to discover your work and then with all your heart give yourself to it.” The Buddha

Every individual has genius inside of them. Everyone is an artist of living. Our education system must effectively help our children to appreciate this and to look inside themselves for their natural gifts, their innate talents, and encourage them to pursue and develop them fully as the central focus of their education.

“He who has a why to live can bear almost any how.” Friedrich Nietzsche

Of course children must still be taught literacy, numeracy and get a broad taste of other subjects. Hopefully they will be inspired by knowledge itself and become imbued with a lifelong thirst for learning. However, of paramount consideration in a child’s education is their need to find and honour what is meaningful in their lives, so that they will be able to live happily and work doing things that they enjoy and believe in.

For, as Jonathan Porritt says: *“...there is precious little chance of ‘solving’ today’s environmental problems unless people are able to find meaning, pleasure and fulfilment in the work they do. For it is still the predominant belief that ‘wealth creation’ consists in enabling people to find a job (any job) to earn the money they need to buy the meaning, pleasure and fulfilment, at second hand, which they can no longer find at first hand in the work they do, that has set the whole human race at war with the Earth.”*

“We must encourage a more poetic, creative and imaginative way of conducting our activities in daily life. With imagination, our social and political organisations gain new spirit and direction.” Satish Kumar

We are powerful and dynamic creative beings. Our culture encourages us to see ourselves as the opposite; merely passive consumers. The new education system will encourage children to cherish their individuality, which when fully expressed, will bring meaning, happiness, inner power, wisdom, the desire to serve, imagination, innovation, spontaneity, creativity and real diversity to the forefront of our culture.

By effectively (meaning, theoretically and practically) placing soul, soil, society at the heart of our children's education; our children, our society and our environment will reap rich rewards, because we will be placing holistic, co-operative, practical, democratic values and an enlightened worldview at the heart of our society. We will be folding meaning into the simplest and most important elements of our culture, our children:

"The way to build a poem or a lifelike and useful system is to 'fold meaning into the simplest elements' and allow complexity to emerge from their natural self-generation.. in an organisation, let the behaviour emerge from the bottom up instead of the top down.. focus on emergent behaviour instead of the final result." David Whyte

But why soul, soil, society ?

Throughout the history of human thought, philosophers and sages have championed three holistic values as being central to the well being of humanity. In the West they are Plato's 'the good, the true and the beautiful'; in the East they are the three jewels of Buddhism, 'the buddha, the dharma and the sangha'; and in the brilliant contemporary philosopher Ken Wilber's work they are the 'Big Three' of art, science and religion/morality.

Linguistically, the three values represent the holistic trinity of 'I', 'it' and 'we' concepts. In modern parlance, 'it' out there represents the environment, 'we' the human community, and 'I' the human individual. In Satish Kumar's terminology they are soul, soil, society. I say we should place these new values, the 'three Ss,' alongside the old values, 'the three Rs', in the education of our children.

I believe that these values are so universal and so important that they are capable of uniting the world. Why? Because they point us in the direction of our greatest need of all, which is Love.

The problem is both external and internal

The apathy, lack of enlightened creativity, co-operation and sharing in our society is both a political and spiritual problem. Reform must therefore encourage selfless behaviour in both an external (political-ethical) and internal (spiritual) directed fashion. In short, we need to bring philosophy, which is the love of spiritual wisdom, into our schools. It is not enough that we teach our children to value their individuality and their free spiritedness, important though these are. To be sure, the need to honour soul, soil, society in our schools will take us much further than this in the education of our children.

In the new society, our children will need to go beyond their personal sense of self and to recognise their relatedness to the environment and to each other on a deeper level. If they do not, our emphasis on the importance of individuality in their education will mean that they will end up (like most people in our culture today) leading an overly self-centred mode of existence - it's all about me, my talents, what I can do, what I want. This attitude is a large part of what is causing all the problems in the first place.

"It is high time the ideal of success should be replaced with the ideal of service." Albert Einstein

For this to happen, we must teach children to recognise their interdependence with all things and to properly honour this connection in their daily lives. The importance of this aspect of educational reform cannot be overemphasised. For if we are to build a new society based on holistic principles, we must weave them skilfully into our children's worldview, for it is they who will tomorrow construct the new world that we dream of today.

"The unreflective life is not worth living." Socrates

Therefore, the political reform of our institutions should be coupled to a spiritual one: we need our education system to encourage our children to remain curious about the relationship between 'self and world' throughout their lives, laying special emphasis on the relationship between the two that accords with the worldview of modern physics. It is a big question, do we exist or don't we ?

"To be or not to be, that is THE question" Shakespeare

If these questions are brought into our schools, the new society will embrace more than just good ethical practice, and will actually transform itself, because our children will learn to live with an emphasis on relationship, rather than self.

4. The Soul (or Spiritual) Element of Education

"The kingdom of God cometh not with outward show; neither shall they say, Lo here! or, Lo there! For behold, the kingdom of God is within you." Luke xvii 20,21

"If the self is expanded to include the natural world, behaviour leading to destruction of this world will be experienced as self destruction" 'Psychology as if the Whole Earth Mattered' conference Harvard University

"Peace comes within the souls of men when they realise their oneness with the Universe." Black Elk

"A human being is a part of the whole called by us a universe – a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and his feelings, as something separate from the rest, a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us; it restricts us to our personal decisions and our affections to a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty." Albert Einstein

It is now well established in modern physics that we humans do not exist in isolation from the rest of the world. In fact, scientists agree that there is no such thing as a separate or isolated 'entity' anywhere in the universe, rather, just as the 'mystics' have always told us, existence is best described in terms of its relationship to the 'other', the so-called outside world. Everything is interrelated and interdependent; we are all part of an infinity of quantum flux which appears to exist on many dimensions.

Our culture has handed us an overly rationalistic mindset, which gives us an alienated and false sense of self. Our admirable eighteenth century enlightenment emphasis on the autonomy and nobility of the individual got coupled in more recent years with the so-called 'death of God'. Our culture came to lack the shared sense of purpose or relatedness under a transcendent power that the idea of God had always provided, and we became prey to egoism.

"Try to treat with equal love all the people with whom you have relations. Thus the abyss between 'myself' and 'yourself' will be filled in, which is the goal of all religious worship." Anandamayi Ma Nirmala Sundari Devi

Our mindset insists that we exist as 'individuals' just because we are able to think individual thoughts ("cogito ergo sum"). We worship the ratio (there is you and there is me, and we are separate) and have utterly lost the sense of 'intuito' (there is you and there is me, and we are deeply connected) to our great and abiding loss. The soul element of the new educational philosophy will correct this, without emphasising or desacralizing any one religious tradition, so that our children can find the inspiration to relate to each other, their communities, and the environment in the most enlightened and creative way possible.

5. Reform of Economics - The Taming of Capitalism – trade made ethical

"Ye have been bought at a price.." I Cor vii 23

"Jesus and Marx agree on one thing anyway, which is that money leaches out all other values." Norman Mailer

One highly destructive model of capitalism is currently running the show, but it is not the only model possible. Capitalism has proven to be the most powerful engine of material development and 'progress' that humans have yet invented. It is time that we put that powerful creative energy to good use, and harnessed the power of capitalism so that it properly serves humanity.

To return to the JS Bach quote above, the western world has predominantly accepted a 'single stubborn melody', namely the 'autocracy' of consumer capitalism, and the forces of globalisation are now making this a global phenomenon, mainly through the insidious and far-reaching power of the media.

To a greater or lesser extent, we all now dance to the tune of 'cold hearted' commodity market economics. Advertising, though clever and artistic in its own way, is really nothing more than propaganda for the completely unsustainable and soul-destroying way of life that multinational corporations would most like us to continue to live. It is to this melody that we, as individuals, whether we like it or not, are being made to dance. We have become mere passive consumers, disempowered, apathetic, isolated, small economic cogs in a huge economic machine.

This 'melody' (if we can call it that) is killing our souls, our communities and our environment, both on a local and global scale, because, at heart, the only value it respects is that of quick economic gain, whatever the long term effect of this on the quality of our lives, the fabric of society, or the ecosystem that sustains us.

We need to create a world where we, as individuals, will be encouraged (financially and otherwise) to dance to a melody that is more to our soul's liking. A melody that places the human spirit, our need for community and the health of our environment as our highest priorities.

We need complete reform of the taxation system so that behaviour by individuals and corporate bodies that serves society, the environment and the human spirit is rewarded/incentivised and that which denigrates it is punished. The revenue that is received as a result of this new system of taxation must then be invested in projects that are sustainable, environmental, community and/or spiritual well-being orientated. In particular, large amounts of public and private wealth must be invested in the research into and development of all forms of renewable energy technology.

Corporations must be heavily incentivised to follow this course, by making them financially responsible for their failure to do so. The first countries that invest heavily and determinedly in renewable energy will reap rich rewards, environmentally and financially, because there is going to be an enormous market for these technologies as the environmental movement rolls forward.

Individuals, under such a regime, would find themselves with more money in their pockets, and so would be at greater liberty to further their own self reliance and create a truly sustainable lifestyle for themselves, their families and their communities, which would bring them even greater support by the state, through tax breaks and subsidies.

Governments would not lose revenues, as corporations, the bodies that are most responsible for the damage that is done to the social fabric and the planetary ecosystem, would be forced to pay a great deal more in taxes. Governments would however be constitutionally obliged to spend most of the revenues they receive on projects that honour the three enlightened values. Companies would then be forced to adapt their practices, for example by investing in alternative technologies, operating on fairtrade principles, and making goods that are needed, predominantly at a local level. As these new principles are gradually phased in, companies, communities and individuals would be able to adapt.

The new system will encourage the rise of environmental and societal accountancy. Although it might appear difficult to measure the qualitative effect of a corporation's actions or omissions in relation the environmental or social fabric, it is becoming easier to do so as we refine our knowledge and put our minds to this new kind of qualitative accounting. It will become progressively more straightforward to measure qualitatively as holistic principles become more a part of mainstream thinking.

6. In Practice

How might the process work in practice?

Over a period of ten years, schools immediately begin teaching holistic philosophy, so that children throughout our nation learn that at their heart the wisdom traditions of all world cultures say the same thing, that 'you are the stars, the planet, I am you and you are me' i.e. that we are profoundly interconnected and interdependent. This teaching is now fully in accordance with modern science.

They will also be taught that this does not need to remain an abstract concept but can become a lived, felt truth. The recognition of the true nature of our being is our spiritual birthright, and it has been withheld for too long in our upbringing in the west. This teaching must be at the heart of our schools' approach, together with the ethics of soul, soil, society, both in theory, and in practice.

The imagination and the needs of the soul will receive special attention in schools, and the idea that everyone has genius within them, if only they can find the courage to tap into their inner life so as to find and nurture their special gifts. The status quo will be shown to be what it is, a dangerous, confused world that has an enormous amount of knowledge but no wisdom, because it is based on an erroneous, narrowly reductionist view of nature and humanity.

Ten years later, by the time that these children leave school, the full impact of the new system will be setting in, and they will be primed and attuned to work and succeed within it.

In the meantime during this ten-year period, corporations will gradually be subjected to greater levels of ethical accounting so that the tax burden is slowly taken over by the corporations and individuals that do the most damage.

Inheritance tax will be reformed so that taxation falls lightest on those who have contributed the most to the well being of society and the environment during their lifetime. Hanging on to money is a waste of its power to serve the good of us all, it is the most powerful engine of change and it must not be hoarded.

These reforms will in turn allow individuals and corporations to reorientate their lives to accord better with the new 'regime' and start to reap the rich rewards of simpler and more sustainable and community orientated activities, which will in turn allow a great freeing up of individual imagination and creative problem solving, as people will have more money in their pockets (less of a tax burden), more free time (they will be gaining more of their essential needs from the community, from alternative self-reliant technologies and from their own back garden veggie patch and they will be actively incentivised to do so, so why work so much ?)

With increased leisure time, they will be better able to pursue the practice of selfless spiritual understanding, which is in itself the greatest wellspring of creative inspiration that there is. The idea that life is a work of art and that we are all artists (genius is in everyone) will take hold of people's imaginations and amazing things will happen.

Our predominant forms of exchange will move from an overwhelmingly cold commodity based one to a more warm hearted gift based approach as our communities warm and grow. It is very possible then that a basic sanity will arise within our society, go to work, and slowly, purposefully, democratically and joyfully begin the long process of creating an enlightened civilisation.

7. Political Opportunity

The '*European Union*' project offers unparalleled opportunity for a contemporary movement to affect a real, effective and lasting political change. Europe can be an example to the world of how to unify while still maintaining and celebrating our wonderful differences. However, I am not inspired by the vision of integration that is currently being put forward by the 'architects' of the union. I believe that Europe must be led by a common vision, a poetic and philosophical coming together.

At present, the European project is being led by bankers and economists, which means more of the same. Europe must strike out for something new and visionary. Europe must look to its deepest roots, and see that what joins us is much more than mere common economic interest, important though that is.

I believe that these three universal human values, combined with a real commitment to authentic regional democracy, must lie at the heart of a new renaissance of the human spirit, and that the '*European Union*' is the perfect vehicle for the establishment of this vision.

Mark Barrett is currently working on the development of this political philosophy and strategy. He welcomes offers of funding as well as debate, constructive criticism or comment. He is also working on a 'soul, soil, society' pilot schools visit project for 2001-2002. If you could offer funding, or you are a teacher and you think that your school would welcome him, Mark can be contacted at marshall_darkness@hotmail.com

The Science of Prayer and Meditation by Dorothy Forster

It is with pleasure that I anticipate John Papworth's symposium with its well-chosen and auspicious group of speakers. I am glad to see that, amongst the list there are several of a religious or ecclesiastical leaning. My comments are not of a religious nature, but they are spiritual; for it seems to me that humanity is in danger, at this present stage of evolution, of losing sight of its essence.

Often we are reminded that we are, primarily, spiritual beings in an earthly body and not earthly bodies with spiritual aspirations. It is the decisions which we make on a spiritual level which rule our actions. If you have read Greg Braden's book "*The Isaiah Effect*" you will know about what I am talking.

He starts by stating "Quantum Science suggests the existence of many possible futures for each moment of our lives. Each future lies in a state of rest until it is awakened by choices made in the present," and goes on to state, "A two-thousand-year-old scroll written by the prophet Isaiah describes precisely such possibilities in a language that we are just beginning to understand. In addition to sharing his visions of our time, Isaiah describes the science of how we choose which future we experience. Each time we do so, we experience the Isaiah effect.

If you have studied Quantum Physics you will know there are 'certain points in time when vital decisions have to be made. Is it not possible that we have experimented too far against the Laws of Nature and are, or have already, approached such a vital point? The results of our choice mean either the prophets of doom are proved right and lead to extinction or we have listened - their message has reached us and we have decided to 'change it' and turn back to follow the Laws of Nature. The best prophets are those who are proved wrong; we have listened and done something about what they tell us. Any decisions made along the way strengthen our decisions at the vital point.

Those who doubt the power of prayer may be interested in some of the incidents which Braden cites and the dramatic effect of prayer. For instance, in the late 80's mass prayer and meditation by dedicated groups focusing on the problem of violent crime in major cities, reduced the problem significantly. Since it was not just one isolated incident, there is only one conclusion which can be made...that it was effective.

Leading up to the turn of the century into the new millennium, the prophets of doom were forecasting many troubles ahead. The other side of that story is that people all over the world in their different groups were gathered in prayer and meditation. The '*Big Ben Silent Minute Prayer for Peace*' alone mustered millions of people around the globe and other peace prayer groups did likewise.

Is it too much to believe that their prayers helped to steer us peacefully through the changes? There is, of course, more work to be done if we are to avert the tragic results of humanity's rape of the earth. We need to love our earth, the animals, the environment, as well as one another and ourselves, with a revised vision, which follows the fundamental Laws of Creation.

The Isaiah effect is a scientific understanding of the power of prophecy, prayer and change. Prophecy gives us a glimpse of the future, prayer enables us to choose our future and change comes as a result of the first two. Braden quotes Robert Boissiese "When prayer and meditation are used rather than relying on new inventions to create imbalance, then they (Humanity) will also find the True Path." (From *Meditations with the Hopi*.)

The scientific teachings of the '*Essenes*' of which the '*Nazarines*' were a sect, dated back 500 years before Christ and spread around the world. It was to ascertain this that Braden travelled to Tibet and found the Abbot, in the high mountain, teaching this same science of prayer and meditation. The essence of these teachings was that the importance of prayer was not only to say them but to feel them. In fact, in modern jargon, we have got to "want"; to really feel the wanting. The Abbot was a prime example of the '*Essene*' teachings which taught that "feeling is the prayer".

Love is the energy of creation. To quote Braden he says, "It is only in our love, or fear, for the objects of our thoughts that we breathe life into the creations of our imagination." He explains that true prayer is not praying for something, but experiencing something which IS. We live the experience through our prayers whereby we make the choice of what already is created and what manifests in our own world is what we choose. Our thanks are for what already IS, and already a part of creation. Whereas if we ask for something, we are acknowledging that it does not already exist.

The flutter of a butterfly's wings in one part of the world can cause a hurricane in the opposite side. Likewise a small decision in one place can cause unknown havoc in another. Always we have choices.

There are many parallel roads, the further apart the greater the difference when a choice is made. When we sow the wind we reap the whirlwind. And "Will you change it?" is the poignant question in the translation of the Bible Code.

Possibilities or probabilities: always at every moment in time the choice is ours but, at the critical time, when there is a critical mass, we have an even more vital point of decision when, apparently, these different parallel roads meet or bridge, when we can move from one to another. According to the Hopi people, we can move backwards and forwards along the paths but, at approximately two thirds along the path is a connecting bridge. The choice made then decides the future.

The Hopi prophecy states "If we hold fast to the sacred way as He (The Creator) decreed it for us, what we have gained we will never lose. But still we have to choose between two ways. A point when vital decisions and choices have to be made is at a time of excessive floods, hurricanes, typhoons, volcanic activity etc.

As example, Braden travelled with a friend into the Mexican desert at the time of a serious drought. At a certain spot his friend did not pray for rain. He prayed rain. With his body and his feeling he was experiencing rain. It was present as a choice and his faith was such that at that moment he was thankful for the rain. In due course the rain came to a ground that was so dried that the rain sat on top of the earth for a time before being absorbed.

From the third 'Annual Conference of the International Society for the Study of the Subtle Energies and Energy Medicine', a report states that it is documented by scientists that the non-physical force of emotion actually changes the physical molecule of DNA. Thus the vital conclusion was that emotion "greatly affects our health and quality of life", that it is the "missing link, or direct line of communication to the very core of life itself".

Since we are connected to the earth, and the earth to us, this must affect all the major problems we are facing at this September 2001 Conference in Swindon.

Expect a miracle ... I believe in miracles.

"The impossible we do today. Miracles take a little longer."

Prayer is the inner science and could be considered the 'Science above all Science' as recommended by Rudolf Steiner, to monitor all scientific discoveries. It can help the 'Universal Mind'. Prophecies are only possibilities which can be redirected.

"More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of." Mort d'Arthur, Tennyson.

"All things shall be well. All things shall be very well." Julian of Norwich.

Let all our hearts both cry and sing for the truth that is within us. All we need to do is to tap into it.

"One thing we know, our God is the same.

This earth is precious to Him;

This we know.

The Earth does not belong to man

Man belongs to the earth.

This we know.

All things are connected like the blood unites the family.

All things are connected.

Whatever befalls the earth befalls the sons of the earth.

Man did not weave the web of life, he is merely a strand in it.

Whatever he does to the web, he does to himself."

Version of a Speech made by Chief Seattle in 1854

'Time is not at all what it seems. It does not flow in only one direction and the future exists simultaneously with the past.' Albert Einstein.