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Afterword – Closing the Gap

Editorial

The state of the world is on everyone's mind whether you are a Quaker or not. I know I go through stages being inspired by the ingenuity of human beings to come up with solutions and moments of despair and hopelessness as I ask, are we simply doing too little too late? It is often said in the world, that we need to be solution-focused and in our anger at disasters not to be blame-focused. This is very true, though it can be very hard, especially when the culture we live in does not practice this on a regular basis. I wonder though, if in Quakerism it is more relevant to be compassion-focused to these disasters. Can we care enough for ourselves and others on this planet, including our

non-human friends? Can we care about the projects we get involved in to fix things and meet them with passion? These are questions I leave for all Quakers to answer, if they so choose.

Around the world recently we all celebrated World Quaker Day in our different ways. Our communities and connections are often something that keep us going. I think it is safe to say all who attended a WQD get together enjoyed it, and in both good and bad times it is important to stay connected. Quakers share this and how they hope to care for the world in these pages.

Bronwen Ellis

WORLD QUAKER DAY
SUNDAY 2 OCTOBER 2022
**'BECOMING THE QUAKERS
THE WORLD NEEDS'**

The graphic features four circular inset images: a woman holding a 'WORLD PROJECT' sign, a group of people in a community setting, a group of people in a meeting, and a person working in a garden. A white dove is positioned in the center. At the bottom, there is a logo with the letters 'F', 'W', and 'C' in colored circles, the website WWW.WORLDQUAKERDAY.ORG, and a globe icon.

As part of its World Quaker Day celebrations, Friends in Bulawayo spent a peaceful day visiting an older Friend and planting a fruit tree in her garden.



WORLD QUAKER DAY

Bulawayo Quaker Meeting

Sipho Nsimbi, Bulawayo Monthly Meeting

We decided to visit and re-connect with our Friend, Georgina Mbambo, who had not been able to attend Meeting for a long time due to health challenges. Even though she moved around with the help of a walking aid she and her husband welcomed us warmly in a great atmosphere full of both concern and laughter at the many news and stories shared among Friends.



In the silence Friends reflected on the Quaker Day Theme 'becoming the Quakers the world needs'. Our Meeting Elders led the worship sharing that followed, with discussions focusing on how we can respond to such a wounded and troubled world we now live in. A number of Friends shared how they have been victims of poor service delivery, especially in health centres, corruption and challenged by the ever-increasing numbers of young people abusing drugs resulting in a lot of anti-social behaviour which parents were unable to deal with. It was the sense of the Meeting though, that Quakers really have their work cut out for them and that now more than ever Quakers need to be more visible in their interventions. Friends felt that Quakers have had impact on environmental issues, advocacy and social accountability issues as well as covering social service gaps that no one else was covering and that this needed to continue.

While acknowledging the strides Quakers worldwide had already made on these fronts, the Meeting felt that the world needs more boldness in our messaging and that we should continue to act in partnerships with like-minded organizations in order to amplify our voices.

One YF testified to the fact that as a recent beneficiary of the Quaker bursary fund, she can proclaim that some efforts seen as "small can actually be big" because the education support she received has put her at

a different level to impact on both her family and the community at large. She sees Quakers as having the capacity and resilience to impact communities and meet specific needs as they emerge. These are the Quakers the world needs as they continue to act in reverence to that of God in everyone. To conclude the day our green-fingered Friend led us to plant a fruit tree in Georgina's garden, which was really appreciated by our host.

(Photos on page 3)



Quaker Day at Schoenies

Wendy Nunn and John Blair, Eastern Cape Quakers

To celebrate Quaker day Eastern Cape Friends met at Schoenmakerskop, a small, beautiful coastal village a few kilometers from Gqeberha. We were fortunate enough to make use of a delightful cottage belonging to friends, a perfect venue for sharing the day with the Grahamstown contingent. Present were Helen and Wouter Holleman, Doreen Bekker and Felicity Edwards from Grahamstown and Jennifer Bowler, Wendy Nunn, Kholelile Tshanga and John Blair from Port Elizabeth.

It had been so long since we have been able to meet on a face-to-face basis that we all appreciated that personal contact again and found that real sense of community that is often difficult to establish in Zoom sessions. Friends had expressed the need to meet on an informal basis after many Zoom Meetings for Business

over the past couple of years, and it was the ideal opportunity to get together as a group. We all enjoyed the personal contact and re-discovered the real sense of community that we missed during Zoom sessions.

Doreen Bekker, who has been on a deep spiritual journey, guided us through an understanding of the concept and experience of centering prayer. She has been inspired by the philosophy and work of Fr Thomas Keating, who, in the tradition of contemplative prayer, set out to present this practice in a more accessible way.

We were able to continue discussions over a long lunchtime in beautiful surroundings before Friends had to start their return journey, and we parted with the hope that we can have similar shared days between Eastern Cape Friends on a regular basis.



Wendy Nunn and Helen Holleman



Kholelile Tshanga and Felicity Edwards



John Blair, Doreen Bekker and Jennifer Bowler

Quaker Community of the Western Cape

Photos by Bronwen Ellis and Graham Thomas





Blue Idol Meeting for Worship

Enid Ellis and Helen Vale, Namibia Quaker Community

The Quakers of Windhoek, Namibia met online with the Blue Idol meeting for World Quaker Day. This was possible as some members had known each other while living in the UK many years ago.

The Blue Idol Meeting House in West Sussex, England, was built as a farmhouse (originally called Little Slatters) around 1580. When William Penn and other Friends in the area bought the building it was idle, ie. unused as a farm house, which meant it could be exempt from tax. And it was painted blue - hence, the Blue Idle Farm House. Due to a mis-spelling on old map of "Idle" it became known as The Blue Idol. In 1691, after it had been used for Quaker worship for a number of years it was converted into a permanent Quaker Meeting House.

Kim Hope, Helen Vale's good Friend invited her

to join their Meeting for Worship on World Quaker day. And at the same time Friends Roger and Louise Williamson extended an invitation to the Namibia Quaker Community to join the Blue Idol Friends at their Meeting.

So doubly welcomed Helen, Justin and Enid logged on to join Blue Idol Friends on 2 October. We were first treated to a virtual tour of the old building. This was particularly interesting since all three of us had previously visited the Meeting House in person.

The Meeting, mostly silent, lasted an hour. One Friend gave a brief report on a march against fracking which she had attended. After that those present in person went to have a picnic lunch in the beautiful Blue Idol Gardens, while Helen stayed on in a break-out room and enjoyed talking to six local Friends.

Quaker leaders in East Africa chose a Bible quote to support World Quaker Day:

"You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden."

(Matthew 5:14).

Creating a stairway to Heaven

Jennifer Bowler, Eastern Cape Quakers

In 2013 the Sci-Fi movie *Elysium*, written and directed by South African, Neill Blomkamp, was released. Set in 2154, the rich live in Elysium, an advanced space station where technology allows them to thrive, while the rest of humanity languish in poverty on an overpopulated, violent, and polluted Earth. Are we heading for the dystopian vision of Elysium? Certainly, currently some billionaires dream dreams of space colonies where elite future generations will be born and live; a future where there will be humans and only animals and plants that serve their needs; a future where the wealthy and powerful have prevailed. Or are we heading for a world where all flourishes; where man has created a future which includes both the human and planetary communities and we behave in such a way as to preserve human life and nature's inherent ability to sustain all life? We suggest that the choice is ours – heaven for the few, or heaven on earth for all.

Our reality in 2022, both globally and locally, finds us faced with the terrible triplets: unemployment, poverty, and inequality. The following global statistics give some indication of the extent of these challenges. With the current world population estimated at 8 billion, the number of persons in employment is about 3 billion; however, approximately 2 billion, that is, 60% of these are in informal and insecure employment. There is considerable poverty, with an estimated 860 million people living on below \$1.90 per day, and 3.3 billion people, (nearly half the world's population) living below the poverty line of \$5.50 per day. There is also extreme inequality, with the world's richest 10% receiving 52% of the global income and owning 76% of the global wealth, whilst the poorest 50% earn 8.5% of the income and own 2% of the wealth. The war between Russia and the Ukraine threatens to deepen these problems.

Invariably world leaders and politicians call for more economic growth to deal with the problems of poverty, unemployment, and inequality. However, the current version of capitalism, particularly since the late 1970s, has brought about work reorganisation, which, coupled with the most recent technological advances of the 4th industrial revolution, has resulted in increasing inequality and unemployment, and has deepened poverty as reflected in the statistics above. Further, we have a more intractable problem. Since the early 1800s when the capitalist economic system emerged and set us upon a growth path, there has been a general improvement in living standards. However,

this combined with technical advances particularly in health and food production, has seen a radical increase in global population from just 1 billion in 1804 to where we now have 8 billion humans. The greatly increased consumption of the world's natural resources has reached the point where the burden currently imposed on the earth exceeds the carrying capacity of the earth's natural system by 1.75 times – the result is environmental degradation and climate change. We are living in the Anthropocene Age, the epoch where exponential growth in human population, and methods of production and consumption are impacting on the world's ecosystems and geology. Homo sapiens has become Homo detritus.

More economic growth does not seem a viable pathway out of the quintuple problems of poverty, inequality, unemployment, environmental degradation, and climate change. As Capra and Luisi (2014) stated, "It is an illusion that unlimited economic growth is possible on a finite planet". This was clearly laid out as early as 1972 in the book, *Limits to Growth*, published by the Club of Rome. Detailed studies using systems dynamic modelling showed that the pursuit of economic growth without regard for environmental limits would result in societal collapse, if not for all humanity, at least for part of humanity. Nevertheless, many economists and world leaders persist in the belief that continual growth is the solution to our problems, while banking on human ingenuity and innovative technology to find a way out of the environmental dilemma. Recently updated models, however, have verified the 1972 predictions, and confirmed that, while innovative technology may mitigate the negative environmental effects, the long-term prognosis remains the same. At best it would seem this path may create a heaven for the few able to insulate themselves in Elysium.

To create a stairway to heaven for all, we must design a new economic system. This system should consider both the limitations of the planet and address the needs of the human population. If we accept that we belong to both a human and planetary community, we must strive to preserve human life and nature's ability to sustain all life. A satisfactory model should provide a balance between the two criteria of social justice, as the fair and equitable distribution of resources, opportunities and privileges, and ecological sustainability, as ensuring that nature is able to sustain all life. However, to successfully design a new system we also need to address two other

pressing issues: one concerns our beliefs and values, the other the rampant inequality between and within nations.

At the very centre lies *Homo sapiens* – the most aggressive and cruel of all earth’s species, a species capable of banding together to murder its own. But our nature represents a complex mix of cruelty and compassion; we are hard-wired for both. We are capable of cooperation, love, altruism, empathy, joy, hope, and gratitude. Without these latter qualities, early human communities would not have survived. As humans we have choices as to how we react and behave. To successfully design and manage a new system for all it is essential we choose the path of compassion. Further, we need a radical readjustment in some of our individual and collective beliefs and values. As a species we need to recognise that we are not above or apart from nature, but embedded in, interconnected with and interdependent on nature. As humans, we are but one of many living species, and each part of our material body is rooted in the earth. We emerged after billions of years from an evolutionary process that began as a sequence of chemical reactions in which the transition from non-living to living matter was made. The documented evidence of man’s spiritual experience confirms a sense of oneness with all creation. There is an understanding that reality is about connectedness, relationship, and interdependence; our very being is interwoven with the universe. We must reject the economic growth narrative of the consumer society which has us believe that material goods determine our worth. It is not true. The ideology of consumerism has allowed material goods to become a symbolic language that mediates our participation in social life and determines our place in society – the more goods we have, the more status, power, and authority. In highly unequal societies these stakes are raised even higher, and the pressure to consume increases as status and class become more important and people are filled with status anxiety. We must uncouple our social and psychological well-being from our possessions. But what then? Without material goods to define our worth and provide a sense of prosperity, what defines our sense of well-being? While we need a basic level of material goods to live with dignity and to maintain physical health, our social and psychological well-being really depends more on our self-acceptance, the quality of our relationships, and meaningful work where we can participate actively and fully, adding value to our families, communities, and society. Achieving this shift in beliefs and values will require the commitment of

Homo sapiens has become *Homo detritus*

global and local political and economic leadership, but perhaps more importantly, it will require the active involvement of civil society in spreading ideas through communication and education. As examples of environmental education, Fritjof Capra advocates working with urban children on developing food gardens to bring about an understanding of the web of life. Our own Helen Holleman with River Rescue in Makhanda is bringing an awareness of rivers, water, and the web of life, to a young generation whose understanding of water to date has been a municipal tap. Small steps with profound impact.

Besides the shift in our beliefs and values, in order to create engagement, cooperation, and consensus around a new economic model, the other critical issue requiring attention is income and wealth inequality. Why is income and wealth inequality an important issue? Because it challenges perceptions of fairness, and justice. It goes to the heart of the criterion of social justice. Studies on income and wealth inequality within nations have shown that negative social problems as diverse as mental and physical health, obesity, educational performance, teenage pregnancy, the size of prison populations, lack of trust and social cohesion, debt, bankruptcies, and competition all increase with a widening of inequality. As mentioned above, it feeds our status anxiety and proves a barrier to breaking the hold of consumerism.

Inequality also heightens the risk of both a breakdown of political and economic stability and an escalation of conflict within and between nations. Multiple forms of violence, as in homicide, gender-based violence, organised crime, attacks on police and state institutions, and terrorism, have emerged and are on the rise. Global inequality of income and wealth, translates into the unequal consumption of the world’s resources. For example,

when looking at climate change, the CO2 emissions of the rich far exceed the emissions of the poor. The richest 10% are responsible for 50% of the carbon emissions and the bottom poorest 50% for 12%. The willingness to address inequality and achieve a greater equality of wealth and income within and between nations will not only serve to minimise many social problems within nations, but will also provide the move towards social justice and smooth the way for greater cooperation and a more coherent response on ecological sustainability.

Besides requiring a shift in our beliefs and values, and the acknowledgement of the detrimental effects of inequality, addressing inequality within a nation to achieve a fairer distribution of income and wealth may be addressed in multiple ways. For example, at

a national level there is progressive taxation, within organisations more egalitarian governance and remuneration structures, job sharing, shorter working weeks, a willingness to move to more labour-intensive production, increasing social protection through mechanisms like the basic income grant, and the more effective delivery of public services.

When we consider the design of a new economic system, we must accept that we still require goods and services, therefore there will be growth. However, to achieve ecological sustainability, we need to structure production to allow for “good growth” as, for example, using renewable power sources, recycling natural resources, and maintaining ecosystems, rather than “bad growth” which generates CO₂, involves the use of toxic chemicals, depletes natural resources, and destroys eco-systems. The article on the circular economy by our Doreen Bekker provides an example of good growth.

Besides a change in production systems, ecological sustainability requires a reduction in excessive consumption to match the Earth’s carrying capacity. However, because of the unequal consumption of the world’s resources as mentioned above, to achieve both social justice and ecological sustainability, the rich, as in the developed countries, need to change both production methods, and reduce consumption. While the poor, as in developing countries, there would need to be growth and increased consumption in order to secure a decent standard of living. This would create a more egalitarian arrangement between countries but must ensure that consumption is aligned with the earth’s carrying capacity. It does mean the growth within developing countries may require a longer transition from ‘bad’ to ‘good growth’ to allow for what is termed a just transition. This requires cooperation within countries and between countries. South Africa’s proposed transition from coal to renewable energy sources offers a complex example of the need for internal stakeholder agreement and cooperation with other countries in order to how to effect to a just transition that does not further marginalise the poor and unemployed.

If we continue on our current path of economic growth with some tweaks here and there, we could probably create a stairway to heaven for the rich and powerful. Or we could adjust our beliefs about ourselves and our place in the universe, revise our views on prosperity and well-being, work towards greater equality within and between nations, reduce our consumption, support a change in economic production, and create a stairway to heaven on earth for all living species. Although it seems that economic and political leaders, and indeed the average citizen, do not seem to realise the enormity of the calamity that is upon us, luckily, around the world there are many active debates

and examples of new production methods and many systemic solutions being explored.

Is there still time? Our human story started with our hunter-gatherer ancestors who knew how to survive on our finite planet. Such societies were, and those remaining are egalitarian, living simply and avoiding accumulation and the depletion of natural resources, limiting human reproduction in times of scarcity, respecting, and honouring other species. Can we go full circle and emulate our hunter-gather ancestors, who understood their place in the Universe? How will our story end? I wonder.

INTERESTING YOUTUBE CLIPS, WEBSITES, BOOKS AND REPORTS

- <https://youtu.be/xbhCpt6PZIU> - Stairway to Heaven, Led Zeppelin 1971
- <https://youtu.be/olBtePb-dGY> Elysium trailer – 2013
- Change management experts say that the first step in effecting change is to create a sense of urgency – it seems to be missing! As shock treatment, the Daily Maverick have just launched a new version of the 1965 song *Eve of Destruction* together with a powerful video- watch it!
- <https://youtu.be/REeWvTRUpMk> *Eve of Destruction* Daily Maverick sponsored version of the 1965 song to highlight climate change. For an updated version of the Earthly horror of Elysium listen to the lyrics and watch the video on YouTube
- <http://www.earth4all.life> Collection of leading thinkers convened by the Club of Rome, Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research, the Stockholm Resilience Centre, and the Norwegian Business School.
- <http://www.timjackson.org.uk>; <https://cusp.ac.uk> – Tim Jackson is an ecological economist who is also the Director of the Centre for the Understanding of Sustainable Prosperity.
- <http://capracourse.net>; <https://www.ecoliteracy.org> – Fritjof Capra is a physicist, systems thinker, and deep ecologist
- <https://www.equalitytrust.org.uk> – Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett are experts on inequality
- <https://www.inequalitylab.world> – Thomas Piketty is a world expert on inequality

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The Circle of Life

Doreen Bekker, Eastern Cape Quakers

It is not the most intellectual of the species that survives; it is not the strongest that survives; but the species that survives is the one that is able best to adapt and adjust to the changing environment in which it finds itself.

— Charles Darwin

1972: the year during which an important document was published. *The Limits to Growth*, a document based on research which used the then new concept of computer modelling to study the “implications of unbridled exponential growth”, was published by The Club of Rome. At that stage few people had heard of the Club of Rome or the possibilities of climate change, and for the most part, the rest didn’t really care. Nevertheless, it is on record that The Club of Rome delegates sounded an important warning in 1972 which largely fell on deaf ears. They warned, if humanity continued on its trajectory of growth, by 2072 the world would be reaping the tragic results of selfish, irresponsible use of our planet.

However, not all were deaf. Much credit must go to those who under the umbrella of the United Nations (UN) started serious and rigorous scientific research for the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). Researchers have conscientiously kept plugging away at collecting irrefutable scientific data since the IPCC was formed in 1988, and gathered about thirty years of data which today clearly show the irreparable damage to our oceans, cryosphere, wetlands, forests, wildlife and other

natural resources. Data which underpin warning after warning to the human species.

2022: the year of UNEP’s international meeting known as Stockholm +50 (S+50). Fifty years since the Club of Rome’s dire warnings, and we have not achieved very much in the way of changing our production and consumption patterns. We still follow the linear economic system in spite of many warnings that change was and is necessary. However, there have been sparks of hope, glimmers of change and the youth are starting to take the warnings to heart, and the Club of Rome continues to “advocate for paradigm and systems shifts”. During the S+50 meeting, numerous speakers from different countries and different walks of life largely spoke with one voice. We have to change, not only the way we produce or act as consumers; we have to change the way we do business, the way we live and the way we think. The main consensus from S+50 was that the world must transition to a regenerative economy, and this has to happen *now*. There is no longer time to dither because our window of opportunity to soften the future blows humanity will inevitably face, has become extremely small.



Figure 1. The Linear Economy

What is a Regenerative Economy and how does it differ from the “Linear Model” the world has been following since the Industrial Revolution? Succinctly put, a linear economy* is “take, make and trash”. This can be depicted using a straight-line diagram (Fig. 1). Starting at one end of the line is the beginning point, extraction. Moving along the line we then have production, then selling and consumption, ending with throwing away our waste at the opposite end. Waste which ends up polluting our rivers and oceans.

On the other hand, a regenerative system is based on how nature works. The Biomimicry Institute (formed in 2006) has done tremendous work in this regard, pointing out that “in nature there is no waste/trash”. On the contrary, in nature everything ends up as a nutrient for something else! It is from this principle of

continuously feeding back into another cycle/circle* of life that the concept of a circular system/economy came. Because this type of circular or regenerative system works the way it does, it is considered to be sustainable, it sustains itself and life on our planet. Our current linear system does the exact opposite. It has been and is, at an ever-increasing rate, destroying our common home.

A circular economy is often represented by a simple, circular diagram (Fig. 2). The basic principle is to minimize waste. In order for this to happen, discarded products must be ploughed back into the production process in some way. A cursory look at this simple circular model may make one think that it’s all about recycling. While recycling is an important component of the circular economy it’s more than just finding ways to reuse some discarded products.

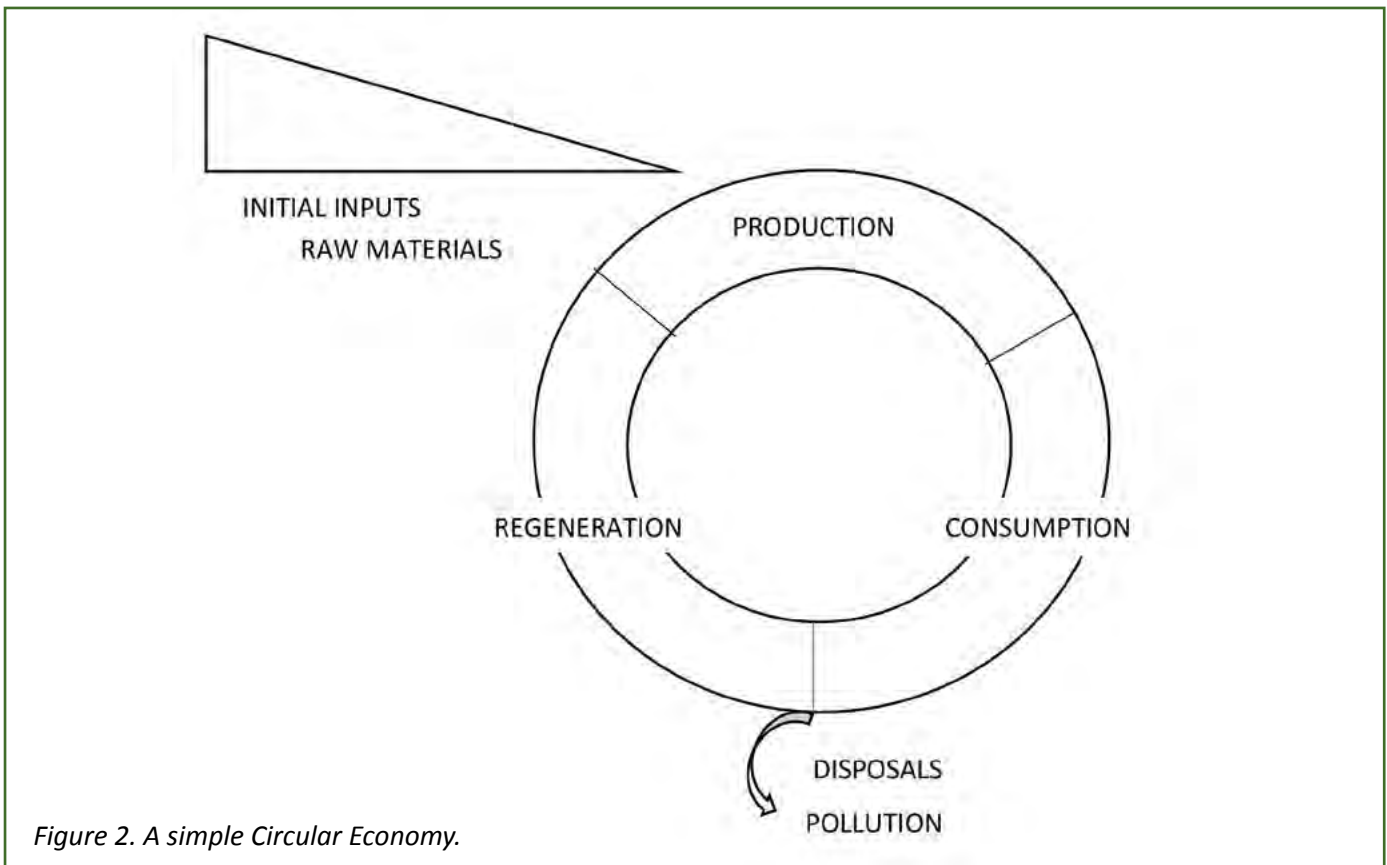


Figure 2. A simple Circular Economy.

A more complex circular regenerative system is represented by the Ellen MacArthur Foundation by a “butterfly” diagram (Fig. 3). One circle (or wing) represents a naturally regenerative system (i.e. the way nature works). The waste of one entity becomes the nutrients for another. The products no longer being

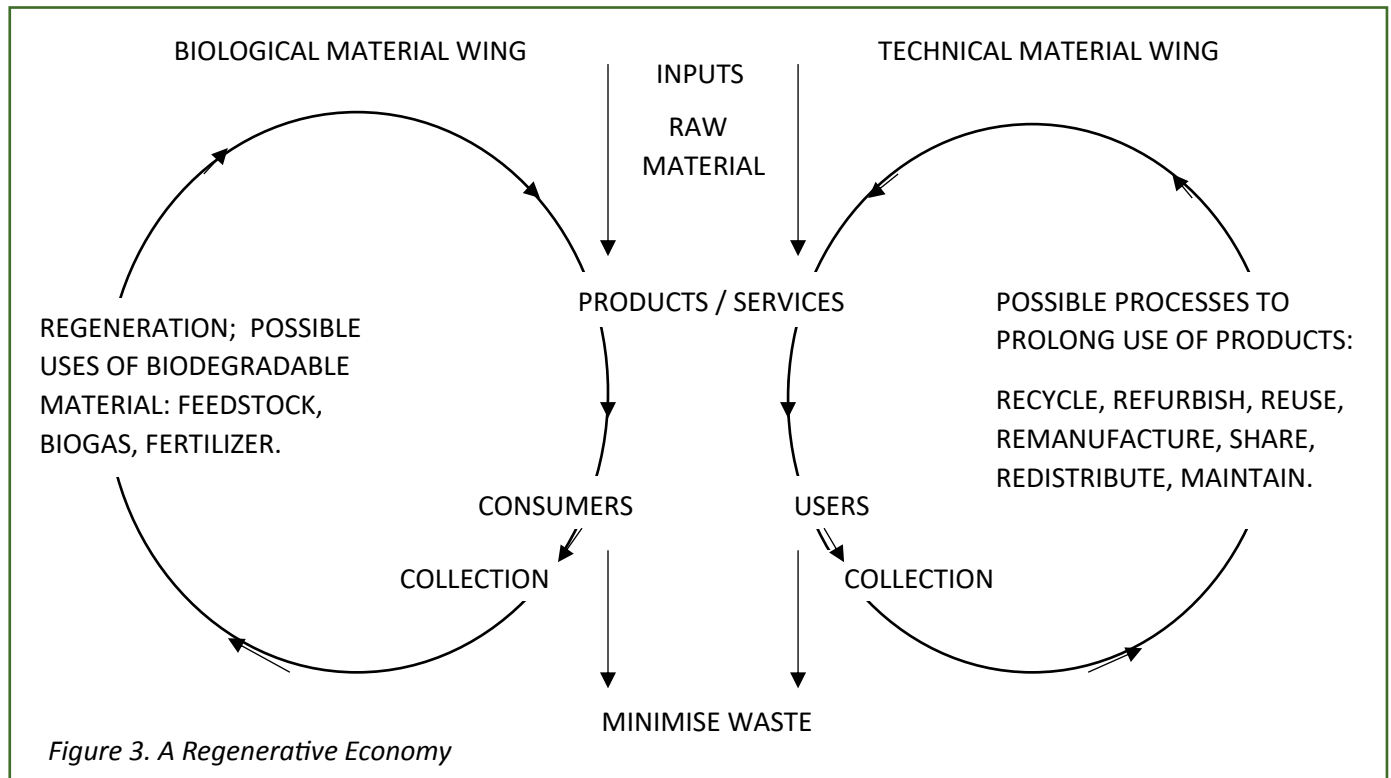
consumed (i.e. the waste) are naturally biodegradable and therefore decompose. This cycle, which could be illustrated in the agricultural sector by aquaponics, is the cycle that depicts the use of “biological material”. It is important to note that for products to naturally biodegrade, these products have to exclude any non-

biodegradable materials! In other words, this cycle represents products made using either naturally biodegradable material or material that is biodegradable “by design”.

The other circle or wing of the butterfly diagram represents production of products using raw materials that will not naturally biodegrade or decompose (i.e. “technical material”). In this loop of the circular-economy it is important that after the first round of production, *most* inputs into the production process

come from products that *users* no longer want to use. In other words, products made from technical, nonbiodegradable material must be kept in use and this would need recovery and feeding back into the economic cycle.

While this does involve recycling it is more complex than is normally thought of when using this term. For example, apart from recycling, products could be refurbished, reused, maintained or even shared, in order to prolong their *usefulness and use*.



A careful consideration of the difference between this regenerative circular economy and the current linear economy shows that in order to minimize (as opposed to merely reduce) waste, it’s not just consumers or users that need to change their behaviour, but producers also need to change their production plans, and entrepreneurs need to reassess what it is that consumers are actually wanting to buy from them.

For example, when consumers buy smart phones are they really wanting to own the device, or is it the “use” of the device that they really want to buy, i.e. do they want to “consume” or merely “use” the product? This subtle difference in discerning consumers’ needs can fundamentally change what a supplier actually sells – a good or a service. If users really just need or want the service, then ownership of the good can remain with the supplier, who can reuse that good as part of future inputs at essentially no extra cost. In other words, the onus to recycle is now firmly in the hands of the producer by virtue of their ownership of the actual product. And if carefully planned, it will be

in the financial interest of producers to recycle or reuse products.

One could argue though, that most of the discussion on circular economies are largely theoretical and speculative. Is this just another unrealistic ideal or can it really work? And can it only work in developed economies? What we really need are some real-world examples of circular systems. Happily, there are a few. For example, The Biomimicry Institute are currently conducting pilot projects in the fashion industry in Western Europe and Ghana to test decomposition technologies. In this sector, the Biomimicry slogan “The Power of Design” comes into its own as “Designing for Decomposition”.

Another example of the circular system working well is the aforementioned aquaponics. In Makhanda/ Grahamstown we are blessed with a few entrepreneurs who have embraced the circular system concept in their aquaponics businesses. I am no expert in this field, but I was very lucky to visit two of the aquaponics farms. I will attempt to explain what I saw. In this system,

fish provide the nutrients for plants (usually but not exclusively vegetables and herbs) which in turn provide the food source for the fish. There is what seemed to me quite a complex interlinking between the fish environment and the growing-of-plants environment. In an ongoing circular system, there is no need to use artificial fertilisers, no need to use poison to kill off insects. Nature's ability to sustain life is harnessed to provide. The vegetables and herbs that I saw and tasted were flourishing, brimming with life and bursting with flavour. At one stage it felt like I walking through an Amazon jungle of tomato, brinjal, leek, celery, fennel, nasturtium, strawberry, mint and other plants! In addition, for me this process also underscored the importance of local production for the health of people and the economy, and gave meaning to the term "from farm to fork"!

One could argue though that aquaponics is a process that lends itself almost naturally to a circular approach. But I suspect it would have been easier to just follow the usual linear route. It took foresight, imagination, hard work, finances and dedication to implement a new way of doing. Yes, it does require all this from the human participants, and more, but is that not our role in this intricate web of life, to be the stewards? Isn't this our role in the circle of life?

While there are some successful examples of the circular system, the question remains, is this a practical answer to the world's economic and resultant environmental problems? As is the case in most economic questions, there is no simplistic answer. Some sectors may be easier to transition to the circular model than others. Transitioning from a linear system to a circular system will more than likely require thinking out the box. It may need large set-up costs, and a longer-term view of returns to investments, together with a reassessment of current producer/consumer relationships. It may also require government reassessment of their role in the economy. It will certainly mean that the current throw-away mentality of some consumers will have to change.

The bottom line though is that the linear business-as-usual model will not be viable for much longer. Humanity has its proverbial back to the wall. We will be forced to change sooner rather than later. A regenerative-circular economy has the potential to transition the world's economies to a sustainable future, but this will require a complete rethink about how we do business and life.

A brief reminder for any disbelievers, the delegates of the Club of Rome gave the world an optimistic 100 years

to make needed and necessary changes. We have come some way since 1972 – there have been some positives but also many setbacks, and we still have a long way to go. We have largely squandered 50 of those 100 years. Some of us may not be around in 2072, but our children and grandchildren may be. I hope we will leave them a world that sustains them, that surrounds them with the beauty of trees, birds, animals, beautiful oceans and whales, glorious sunsets and starry nights, that provides enough sustenance for them and their offspring and that they have the blessings of hope, joy and love. All this for them then, because hopefully we care enough now to ensure that our waste becomes part of the circle of life, and not just a heap of trash.

*See the video called "The Story of Stuff" (2007), the link is under References. It provides a quick, basic explanation of a linear economy, as well as a brief look at the basic idea behind a circular economy.

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Natural Money, the Way to Prevent Inflation

Rory Short, Quaker Community of Johannesburg

The invention of money was the open sesame to economic expansion for human communities as through money's value representing abilities it enabled successful economic exchanges of goods and services to involve more than just two parties.

Humans value things. Money is an external representation of the value of a thing, anything. These values of course originate in human minds. So, the irrefutable way to produce new money, that is both natural and honest, is for its production to be the externalisation of the values of things that are involved in satisfactorily *completed* exchanges.

Now, from a validity of value perspective there are two categories of money, new money and old money. **New money** is money the value of which has not yet been irrefutably confirmed. **Old money** is money the value of which has been irrefutably confirmed.

Inflation arises when the process of confirming the validity of the value of new money goes awry. How to correctly and irrefutably confirm the value of new money? This is best done through purchases executed

by means of credit cards.

Purchases by credit card provide new money the value of which is confirmed once the credit card debt is paid off with old money. Ideally this should happen within 30 days. If there is to be no money system caused inflation then credit card debts older than 30 days have to be paid off by loans of old money.

If the above were the only means by which new money was allowed into circulation, then inflation, induced by the current money system and its ability to over produce new money would not arise.

The essential purpose of the externalisation of value in money is to enable the exchange of goods and services with a universe of possible participants, it is not to act as a timeless store of value. Consequently, old money's holders must be incentivised to use it not hold it unused. Use could either mean spending it or investing it. Thus, any amount of money held for more than thirty days unspent should be decreased, not in value but in quantity, by means of a percentage holding charge.

Anonymity of Money

Rory Short, Quaker Community of Johannesburg

Money is our means for facilitating exchanges of goods and services. An unfortunate side effect of this facilitation is that the exchanging parties lose sight of one another and this opens the way for criminals to abuse the use money. This was never the case when we bartered. Then the exchanging parties had sight of one and other and had to trust one another otherwise the exchange would not have happened.

One way that the visibility of exchange participants can be recovered is if a record of the identity of the holder of a unit of currency, in the form of their ID or passport number, is recorded every time the unit changes hands. Such recordings are not easy to do with physical notes and coins however, but with digital money such recordings are easy to make.

As more and more of our money is in digital form we should advocate for the recording, on each unit, of the identity of each honest possessor of the unit. This would mean that when a unit was used to make a payment the

recipient of the payment's ID would have to be recorded on each of the units of currency used to make the payment. Thus, over time a history of the unit holder's identities would be built up for each unit. Then when a unit is presented to make a payment, the recipient could easily verify that the presenter of the unit is its rightful owner, if not they could refuse the payment. If they did not refuse the payment, they would become complicit in criminal activity.

This would greatly reduce the theft of money because a thief could not use stolen money to make payments as they would not be the rightful owner of the money and anyone who accepted it in payment would become complicit in crime.

Where money is obtained through corruption the path the money has travelled in order to get into the recipient's hands, i.e. the money laundering steps, would be clearly visible to any authority responsible for eliminating corruption making the task of eliminating it much easier to do.



QUAKERS IN ACTION



My father meets Dr Gumede, virtually the only black doctor in the neighbourhood, who turns out to have been trained in Birmingham ...

The Friends Ambulance Unit in South Africa — Part 3

Anthony Barlow

Monday, 10th August 1942 – Durban (No 10)



My dearest

[.....] Today, a usual morning. I left Camp early, as I went as Maurice's guest to a Rotary luncheon. I always find Rotary rather amusing. Guests are always introduced so publicly: "May I introduce Mr Barlow, leader of the Friends Ambulance Unit," followed by a scattering of friendly applause.

There was an excellent speech on Race Relations and the War by a Prof Hörule, making a very eloquent plea for a more enlightened native policy. He said that if South Africa did not think again on this subject, she would find herself left far behind as a nation. The native troops, he said, are even now fighting so well, that white soldiers are beginning to realise their worth, and that after the war they must

be given proper treatment. He illustrated this part of his talk with stories of praise told by white soldiers of their native colleagues.

Hörule is here as chairman of the Commission on Indian Education, and is a most likeable person and was making fun of Maurice for appearing before the Commission in three separate capacities. Professor Hörule said "I don't wish to be irreverent, but if I ever have any difficulty in understanding the Holy Trinity, I'll think of Maurice Webb appearing before the Commission as President of one Society, Chairman of another and Secretary of a third; and always Maurice Webb!"

Then I went to see a Doctor Innes Gumede, a local black Doctor who was connected to McCord Hospital, where some of our chaps were working. Such a coincidence, as I discovered he had trained

in Birmingham between 1923 and 29 and was, I believe, only the second black African medical doctor to qualify. Not only did he train in Birmingham, but would you believe, he had lived near us in Selly Oak at Kingsmead Methodist College. "Barlow" he said, "Barlow is a well-known name in Birmingham; I knew your mother, Mabel. Very fine lady". He seemed genuinely glad to see me and hear news of the Colleges, where he had discovered a spiritual home.

He later opened up a practice at Inanda, a township a few miles outside Durban, which he said was where Gandhi had lived during his time in South Africa. But the good doctor felt somewhat aggrieved at the way he'd been treated in his home land, as he had been refused any financial assistance to help in providing accommodation for his patients. He was in fact virtually the only doctor for the native population, many of whom would often travel long distances in order to see him. Not much has changed I fear since the Mahatma's time. Dr Gumede's difficulties are sadly symptomatic of this whole country. The prejudice against the coloured population is really terrible and the country is riven with such problems, but both Maurice and Dr Gumede, somehow remain optimistic, saying much the same thing, that they still love the country despite its many problems, simply because it is so fierce and young. Maurice was quite eloquent about this on Sunday.

After I had seen Dr Gumede, I visited the South African Red Cross to see if there was any work they could offer our chaps, and they were optimistic... though quite likely the work will come up just as we are about to move on! On the way home I paid my outstanding dentist's bill, and ended up having supper with the engineer I'd shared my cabin with on the boat.

I miss you terribly already, and wonder how on earth I am going to manage for months without you. I can only pray that it won't be too long before we all meet again. I know I have responsibility for the men here, and then I think on that and just take hold and shake myself up and get on with it. But it is a struggle without you here and all the time aching for news of you. I suppose it's these sort of times which are the acid test of character. The long waiting, the forced inactivity, rather than the rush and press of work and action. Well, I know I must try. Keep me in your thoughts, my dearest.

"Our stay in Durban seemed an eternity, and there were days when I thought we would never get away. I would get depressed, thinking that there must be more I could do about it. But I tried hard not to let it get me down, and to be positive for the boys sake and to keep their spirits up."

One of the first black African Doctors



Doctor Innes Balintine Gumede

Photo courtesy of Dr Gumede's grandson Mr Samvu Gumede

"Then I went to see a Doctor Innes Gumede, a local black Doctor [...] Such a coincidence, as I discovered not only had he trained in Birmingham but lived near us in Selly Oak. [...]"

He was only the second qualified black African doctor in South Africa....the prejudice he received made him aggrieved....but native people came from miles around to be treated by him. Despite its problems, he says he still loves such a fierce, young country."

Thursday 13th August 1942 – Durban (10 contd)



My dearest Joan

Well, we are still here in Durban and I'm now getting very depressed about it. There is still no news and I wonder all the time if I ought to be doing more to get us moving, and yet being unable to do it. I just pray that we shall be moving soon. Movement Control naturally give us no information. I try hard to think positively though and on the whole, I suppose I have enjoyed my stay here. Well, perhaps enjoy is too strong a word, but it has been extremely interesting and we have received great kindness, such as I'll never forget.

Yesterday I went to see the city's Air Raid Precautions man, who was quite amiable. They all treated me as though I was an expert, God forgive me! I also called the South African Red Cross again and the British Red Cross, though they had nothing

very positive to offer. In the evening I had supper with Maurice, and this time managed to catch the 8.0 o'clock train home with no problem. [...]

Saturday and Sunday had turned into a minor triumph, though I say it as shouldn't! Occasionally I can get permission for the lads to sleep out, so after I'd talked to Maurice the other day, I suggested that we should all march out to Adams College and spend the night there. I thought it would make a real change and be nice for us to get our own meals, while at the same time giving us good marching exercise. When the date was still some way off, everyone thought it a great idea. But naturally as the time came nearer, no-one wanted to go. "Damned bad idea. Whose idea was that?" However, as it was all fixed and the food ordered, I stuck firmly to my guns. We walked for about nine miles and then I marched the unwilling crowd another nine miles up hill, which afforded us sensational views out to sea and over the hill country beyond.

We were carrying all our own bedding and necessaries, and I was full of foreboding that the whole enterprise would turn into a disastrous and wretched week-end. But by the grace of God, it was a terrific success, and everyone enjoyed it. Our own two cooks had ordered extra food in addition to the rations we had carried with us from camp, and went on ahead to prepare it. So when we got back to the College, we all had an excellent meal awaiting us. We invited the Principal, as well as some of the coloured staff to be our guests. Then they invited us into the dining hall where some 400 black students of both sexes were assembled, who sang to us really beautifully. Somebody made a speech welcoming us, to which I replied at short notice, and then there was some more singing. Finally some of the white staff all put on another entertainment for us, after which, tired out, we all slept soundly on the floor in one of the empty class rooms.

More tomorrow,
Ralph

Sunday, 15th August 1942 – Durban (10 contd)



My dearest

[...] I rose early this morning, had a leisurely breakfast and afterwards to church. It was rather a poor service, and save for some great old Zulu hymns quite beautifully sung, awfully dull. It was a Communion service, which made it last an hour and half!

Anyway, we then had lunch, and our cooks really excelled themselves, as they have the whole stay. This morning for breakfast they gave us mealie porridge and scrambled eggs and for lunch, ham and salad with hollowed-out tomatoes stuffed with pineapple and banana, topped by generous helpings

of mayonnaise, followed by fruit.

The weekend had gone so well, that I decided to postpone our scheduled departure and let people just amuse themselves for the afternoon. Johnnie Gough and four others meanwhile returned to Camp, just to ensure that nothing drastic had occurred in our absence, whilst I went around making sure we had all cleared up properly, before getting in another half hour of birding!

Before we left, we were beautifully looked after by Dr Wilkes, a German refugee Friend. He and his wife work here at the College and he is a most charming man; dignified, humble, friendly, understanding and sympathetic. One feels that even though he and his family have suffered much in life, miraculously they've managed not to become in any way embittered. Prior to moving here, he had previously lived many years in Switzerland and loved it there. But now they have a bungalow here, set quite high up, with a wonderful view of trees and hills and sea. In the front they have a rock garden, which he tends with obvious love and care, and I spent a peaceful thirty minutes, just looking out over the sun drenched country and chatting with him. He is a great bird lover as well as something of an artist, and it was a pleasure to share his company and erudition and to look at all his wonderful books and pictures.

They kindly gave us all tea, and afterwards we marched back home in the cool of the evening with the last half hour entirely by moonlight. It had been a very rewarding exercise, but a wearing one. What with making all the arrangements, then having to cope with some of the troops not wanting to go. And once we got there, being concerned that everyone should be on their best behaviour, and before we left wanting to be sure we had properly thanked everyone.

However, finally, they all said how much they had enjoyed it. And at the end, by collecting up the left-overs, including some bread I was able to scrounge from the Camp kitchen, there was enough to feed everybody again when we eventually arrived back at just after 9.0 o'clock. Quite a triumph in itself! Exhausting! I'm really quite tired now and long only for a place where "the wicked cease from troubling and the weary are at rest" as the poet Henry Milman puts it!

May God keep you my dear, all for now, Love
Ralph

Friday, 28th August 1942

My dear Joan



All blessings - I got your cable today, which made me feel so much happier, and consequently already I feel over the worst of my depression. It is a great relief to know that

you are alright. [...] Maurice is such a good friend to us, and we have now fixed up the room in town, which he found for us, and it will act as a centre and common-room, where people can go and write and read, and where we can have meetings, lectures etc. I have also fixed up another hospital section, for two people in a VD clinic and two in Casualty. That makes 19 of us in all now working in hospitals. Last night I had supper with Maurice, who said he had written to you, and I know Florence has also written. Both have really been most extraordinarily kind and helpful.

Friday, 28th August 1942

My dearest Joan



Great news today. Hallelujah, hallelujah, hallelujah! If all goes well, we might actually be off tomorrow. I heard midday yesterday and I was really happy – as happy as I can be that is! To be off at last is wonderful. I know that there are still many, many things that could still possibly stop us going, but it really is a weight off my mind. Although we have been royally looked after by South African Friends, we do have to get on up to Cairo. But I have got to like Florence very much, and Maurice a great deal: they have both become friends. [...]

With a little time still left, Maurice took several of us out for a drive. It was especially nice as we could

relax a little, knowing we were at last moving on. It was a glorious afternoon, and we drove up inland through miles of sugar cane fields, up and up as far as the Valley of a Thousand Hills, which lay in front of us. There was a long valley with high hills on either side running out into fine bluffs and headlands, covered mostly with rough grass, with here and there stretches of bush or isolated clumps of trees. The view stretched away, line after line of hills, hazy in the afternoon sunshine.

We left the car and walked. The air was fresh and warm on our cheeks, and ahead of us the Valley stretched out on either side, down a little stream which ran over broad rocks, where native children paddled and women with enormous breasts washed their clothes. The stream eventually went over a great cliff into a deep narrow valley with high limestone cliffs on either side. The trees below the rocks were still winter bare, only just beginning to show a hint of green. It was all quite lovely, but made me aware of how much I missed England and its countryside.

After five weeks in the city, they were at last able to embark on the final stage of their journey and make their way to Cairo.



NON-QUAKERS IN ACTION

Leafline is a Life Line

Bronwen Ellis, Quaker Community of the Western Cape



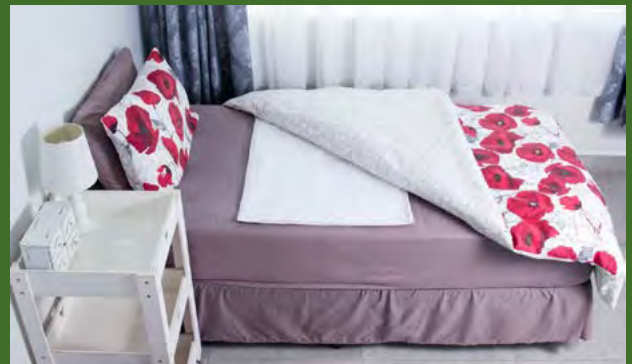
In 2020, just before the Covid-19 outbreak in South Africa, I went on a road trip through the Eastern Cape and decided to visit the Big Pineapple just outside Bathurst. I considered it South Africa's answer to the World's Biggest Ball of Yarn or any other roadside attractions, and seeing it was a good chuckle. I browsed around it's museum, bought a fridge magnet and went on my way. When Candy Androliakos was there in 2014 she left with a fantastic idea. She read on a billboard about the amazing uses of pineapple fibres created from the leaves. She decided to start making incontinence pads for the elderly from them, as well as sanitary pads, nappies and other products. This had been weighing on her mind, as many elderly people find these products expensive and it takes a large amount of their limited pensions.

This was the start of the company Leafline. I will be honest when I first heard this I was a little sceptical. Pineapple leaves are prickly and I would not have thought they could be made into anything comfy to wear. But the outside of the leaves are stripped and when the inside fibres are treated with a hammer mill machine, they become very soft and fluffy. After this process they are also stronger than cotton. They are also very absorbent which makes them great for dealing with odours and bacteria. Because these pads are washable and reusable, they are much more cost effective.

They do need replacing in the end, but they are biodegradable so they are not an environmental hazard. The plastics from regular, single use pads can stay in the landfill for an estimated 500 years at least. This also affects animals living nearby that wander onto landfills looking for food and there are toxins that wash



Leafline's origins are rooted in searching for a cost-effective way of dealing with adult incontinence. Its range has expanded





“GIVING DIGNITY: Each of the girls at Qhayiya Primary School in Nolukhanyo township in Bathurst received two special sanitary pads from Leafline. Leafline supervisor Funeka Xhanti, left, delivers the pads to the pupils.”

Photo: Knowles, Rob. *Talk OF THE TOWN [Bathurst]*, 16 September 2021, p.3. <https://www.pressreader.com/south-africa/talk-of-the-town/20210916/281509344317594>.

into nearby rivers. With pads that are washable and reusable, the amount that ends up there is reduced as well as breaking down quickly. This is a huge improvement.

Leafline also helps create employment, and the company employs women from the Enkuthazweni Special Needs Centre, who have been trained to sew the products. Disabled people are so often overlooked for employment.

These products are important in other ways too. They don't just help save money and help protect the natural environment. They give people their dignity back. The elderly have a little more freedom and young girls have more of a chance at a future. In some cases, young girls have to miss school when they have their period

as there is no other option. The Pad Poverty Campaign in Bathurst has, so far helped donate over 300 pads to different schools in the community. They plan to continue doing this as long as they can.

So far Candy has won the GAP GREEN AWARD in 2018 and The SABF Awards in 2021. I can only hope this company continues to thrive.

Campaigns for Pad Poverty have been run on social media and even once at the local Spar shop. You can still make donations to this very worthy cause by contacting Candy at: 073 165 5632 / candy@leafline.co.za

Or keep an eye open on their Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/LeaflineSanitaryWear/>

All these products are available for purchase at: <https://leafline.co.za/>

to include affordable and biogradable sanitary products, breast pads, nappies, and chair and bed protectors.



BOOK REVIEW

Countdown, Alan Weisman, 2013, published by Little, Brown, Great Britain, 513 pp.

Helen Holleman, Eastern Cape Quakers

“Every 4½ days there are a million more people on the planet.” So reads the blurb on the back cover of this sobering book.

The writer opens his analysis of the drivers of population growth in Jerusalem with a chapter titled “Battle of the Babies” and poses four questions for the people of that contested strip of land ironically called the “Holy Land”; questions that are as pertinent for us:

1. How many people can their land really hold? For that matter, since the influence of this Holy Land extends far beyond its disputed borders, how many people can our planet hold?
2. If, in order to have an ecosystem robust enough to insure human survival, we have to avoid growing past 10 billion [...] is there an acceptable, nonviolent way to convince people of all cultures, religions, nationalities, tribes and political systems of the world that it's in their best interests to do so? Is there anything in their liturgies, histories, or belief systems – or any other reason – that potentially embraces the seemingly unnatural idea of limiting what comes most naturally to us and to all other species: making copies of ourselves?
3. How much ecosystem is required to maintain human life? Or, what species or ecological processes are essential to our survival? Or, at what point does our overwhelming presence displace so many other species that eventually we push something off the planet that we didn't realise our own existence depended on, until too late? What can't we absolutely live without?
4. If a sustainable population for the Earth turns out to be less than the 10+ billion we're headed for, or even less than the 7 billion we already number, how do we design an economy for a shrinking population, and then for a stable one – meaning, an economy that can prosper without depending on constant growth?

Weisman deals with every imaginable aspect of overpopulation in more than twenty countries around the world. He tackles religious, cultural, and political objections to birth-control in countries as diverse as Mexico (in 1975, home to one of the largest orphanages in the world, with 1200 children), Thailand (where condoms gave rise to a chain of restaurants), China (and the unintended consequences of the one-child policy), the Sahel, Japan (with negative population growth), the United States, Rwanda, India, Italy.



He exposes the disastrous aftermath of the ‘Green Revolution’, initially so filled with promise to feed the burgeoning population and describes the toxic side-effects of the agro-industrial complex: “rising rates of breast and prostate cancer, autism ... attention-deficit disorder ... diabetes ... and – if that weren't alarming enough – scrambled sexuality in fauna, ranging from fish to frogs to alligators, polar bears, and humans.”

Our growing numbers are linked to desertification, poverty, hunger and war, to the cancer of urbanisation, and the depletion of clean air and water. He documents the rape of natural resources and the decline of biodiversity as the human species colonises and out-competes thousands of other species, irrevocably destroying habitat, ignorantly killing what may in fact be vital to our sustenance and survival on this planet.

Scathing of the banking system, of political inaction, of corporate greed, Weisman pins his hopes on ‘ordinary people’. His exchanges with women from all walks of life reveal how much they would prefer to marry later, to delay having children, to have fewer of them... to have the resources to be able to feed and care for the ones they already have.

He closes on a warning note:

“... either we take control ourselves, and humanely

bring our numbers down by recruiting fewer new members of the human race to take our places, or nature is going to hand out a pile of pink slips. When you see survival of the fittest portrayed on the National Geographic Channel, it's entertaining. When it happens to your own species, it's not pretty."

The global human population will reach 8 billion in mid-November this year, from an estimated 2.5 billion in 1950. We have added 1 billion people since 2010, and 2 billion 1998. I've been watching the extreme weather

and its effects over the globe: huge fires in Europe, drought, floods, starvation, wars wherever the news cameras are directed. It's not pretty.

Although 'old' (2013), Weisman's insights are prophetic. I read Countdown in tandem with Fritjof Capra's *The Turning Point* (1982) and Tim Flannery's *The Weathermakers* (2005), all of them more than a decade old now. I highly recommend all of them for clear thinking about the issues confronting our species, and for engendering the resilience to face them.

The Battle For God: Fundamentalism In Judaism, Christianity And Islam, Karen Armstrong, 2000, published by Knopf/HarperCollins, 442 pp.

Wouter Holleman, Eastern Cape Quakers

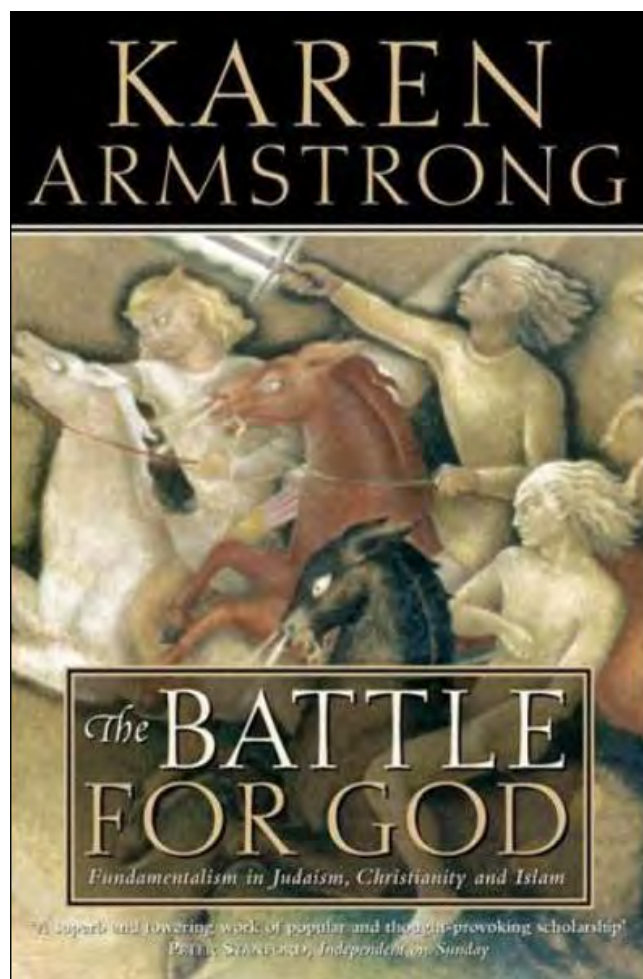
In this fascinating read Karen Armstrong looks at the evolution of 'fundamentalism' in the three Bible-based faiths, Christianity, Judaism and Islam. She starts with the persecution of the Jews in Spain after the armies of King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella conquered the last Muslim stronghold, the city-state of Granada in 1492.

Armstrong "demonstrates how pre-modern peoples saw religion as belonging firmly to the realm of mythos. Religion was concerned with stories and concepts not to be taken literally, but used as ways to consider the nature of humanity, our relationship to the spiritual, and our place in the world. Logos is useful for science and politics, but it cannot answer the big questions of existence: that is the job of mythos, and the two realms of truth were kept very separate until a few hundred years ago. But after the Enlightenment, when rationalism became so effective and so much a part of life, there was a gradual change of mood, and an increased sense that scientific truth was more important than spiritual or mythic truths. Mythos became sidelined and subsequently discredited as 'only' a myth. It was, Armstrong argues, in reaction to this mentality that some religious groups, feeling threatened, attempted to reinterpret mythos as logos, taking religious concepts as being literally true, and using them as a basis for legislation and political life. The United States Constitution makes a very clear separation between church and state, which does not rest easy for conservative Christians, amongst whom many saw the USA as the 'New Jerusalem' where the second coming was to be, and conflict between the people of Iran and a 'religion'-centered government. (Warwick of Goodreads)

By contrast, in Islam the battle was – and still is – first, to adapt to the modern world and then to maintain the fundamental practices of Shia and Sunni Islam, in Iran and Egypt in particular. In both these countries the commercial interests and interference of the West, particularly in oil-rich Iran, created the antipathy that

we still witness today in the relationship between the US and Iran.

"In the pre-modern Catholic Church, the Eucharist was a rich spiritual symbol of human participation in the divine. But for the rational Reformers, it must either be literally true (Luther), or else plain false (Zwingli, Calvin). They were unable to see beyond scientific truth. Similarly, for many Orthodox Jews in the 1930s and '40s, the idea of a modern State of Israel was deeply abhorrent. For them, Israel was a profound symbol of their religion, a vital part of Jewish spirituality to be contemplated – not a place to make a farm and start tilling sacred soil. When many of the ultra-Orthodox considered a kibbutz, Armstrong writes, they 'felt the same outrage and dread as, later, people felt when the



heard about the Nazi death camps.' She adds, 'This is not an exaggeration,' and cites Jewish clerics who actually blamed the Holocaust on the settlement of Israel." (Warwick of Goodreads)

There are many reviews of this fascinating book on the internet, and most reviewers give it a rating of 4 or 5 stars. For me though, the book's fascination lies in the ways in which we see recent events unfold in the US with the rise of conservatism in the US, demonstrated

by the overturning of Roe vs Wade, in Iran with the demonstrations that have resulted from the death of young Mahsa Amini in Iran, and the influence of orthodox Jews in the Israeli government to drive the Palestinians out of the Promised Land, for only then will Messiah come.

See https://www.goodreads.com/review/show/481789134?book_show_action=true&from_review_page=1

***How the World Really Works: A Scientist's Guide to Our Past, Present, and Future*, Vaclav Smil, Viking, 2022**

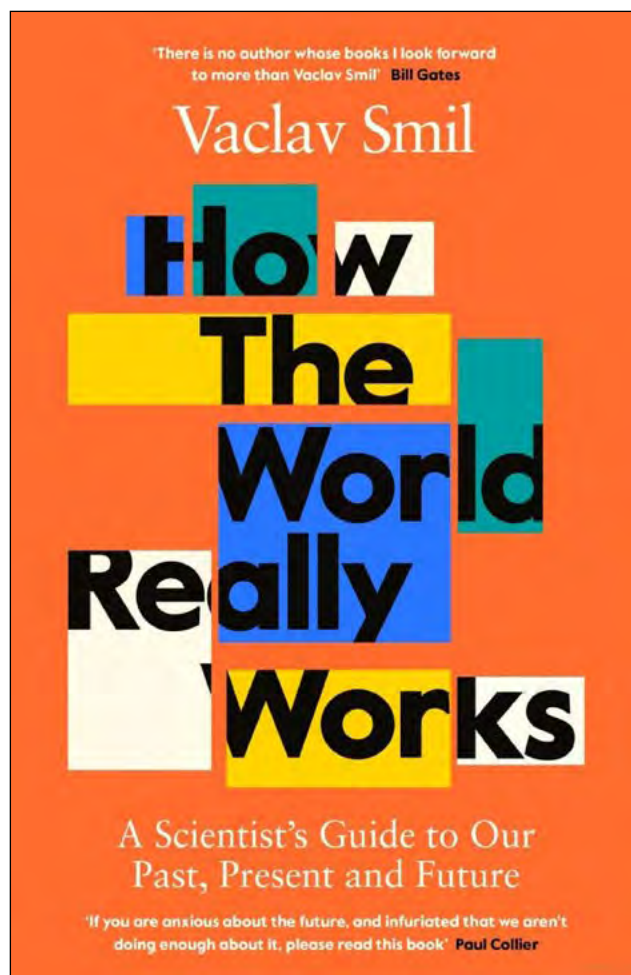
George Ellis, Quaker Community of the Western Cape

Humanity is at present facing a series of global crises resulting on the one hand from exponential population growth and consequent ever expanding resource use and environmental pollution leading to global climate change, and on the other the rise of hyper-Capitalist anti-democratic political movements across the globe, often mixed in with varieties of religious fundamentalism.

In facing this crisis and what we should try to do about it, it is essential to have a realistic view of what the situation is, based in sound scientific analyses of the interlocking set of environmental issues on the one hand, and well-informed values-based analyses of the political, psychological, and economic interactions feeding destructive populist movements on the other. It is crucial that our understandings, while being shaped by a passion for justice and caring for others and our environment, is not just an emotional reaction that does not take realities into account. We must have the courage to look the issues squarely in the face and not get swept along by passions that in the end are based on too simplistic an understanding of our interlocking crises, sometimes being shaped by deliberate misinformation or misleading slogans.

[Vaclav Smil](#) is a scientist who does interdisciplinary research in the fields of energy, environmental and population change, food production, history of technical innovation, risk assessment, and public policy. He has published more than 40 books and about 500 papers on these topics. He is a Distinguished Professor Emeritus at the University of Manitoba, a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada, and a Member of the Order of Canada. His research papers have over 25 000 [citations](#), with work covering the nitrogen cycle, energy issues, agriculture, and so on. His book *How The World Really Works* summarises the important findings resulting from these decades of work, allowing us a realistic viewpoint as a basis for our considered reactions.

The book has seven sections, dealing with Energy, Food Production, the Material World, Globalisation,



Understanding Risks, Understanding the Environment, and Understanding the Future. Each chapter is well documents in terms of evidence, and each sub heading indicates important aspects of what the chapter is about. The key point he makes is how these aspects are interrelated in crucial unexpected ways.

Chapter 1

Chapter 1 focuses on the way energy conversions are the very basis of life and evolution. "Modern history can be seen as an unusually rapid sequence of transitions to new energy sources, and the modern world is a cumulative result of those conversions ... the economic system is essentially a system for extracting, processing and transforming energy as resources into energy embodied in products and services". While crude oil

has dominated energy use for decades, and is crucial for farming, electricity is far easier to transform and use, but generating industrial scale electricity is a costly undertaking. Decarbonisation outside of electricity generation has progressed slowly: for example, Germany will soon generate half of its electricity from renewables, but the share of fossil fuels in the countries primary energy supply has only declined from about 84 to 78 percent. On land, large nuclear reactors are the most reliable producers of energy; even the European Union now recognizes it cannot meet its ambitious decarbonisation targets without nuclear reactors.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 details the way large scale farming depends on fossil fuels in their direct and indirect use in production of our foods, powering machinery, transportation, and irrigation, as well as production of agricultural machinery, fertiliser, and fungicides and insecticides to minimise crop loss, and herbicides to control weed competition for nutrients and water. The key needs are potassium, phosphorus, and particularly ammonia synthesis to provide nitrogen, which uses energy for production. The author documents the energy costs of bread, chicken, and tomatoes and the large amount of fossil fuel needed to produce each on an industrial scale – which is needed to feed a hungry world. Where we could make a big difference is if we wasted food less, and had better crop storage, including energy-expensive refrigeration in hot countries.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 shows the material world depends on four key pillars. These are not silicon chips, which enhance life possibilities but are not essential for our modern civilisation. These are firstly, ammonia, already mentioned, which is the key to feeding the world; without its use as the dominant nitrogen fertilizer, without which it would be impossible to feed at least 40% of our current 8 billion population. Secondly, plastics in many forms, which are ubiquitous in the home and transport and fabrics and in particular in health care in a modern hospital. Thirdly, steel, a ubiquitous construction material and component of household goods such as knives, hammers, cooking pots, garden tools, which is also recyclable (but at a considerable energy cost). Finally concrete, used in building construction, bridges, highways, airports, ports, dams, and so on. Modern economies are tied to massive material flows – which all cost energy.

Chapter 4

Chapter 4 turns to understanding globalisation, “the growing interdependence of the world’s economies, cultures, and populations brought about by the cross-border trade in goods and services, technology, and

flows of investments, people, and information”. It is enabled by container ships and aircraft and trains and trucks and motorcars, pipelines and optical fibre cables, satellite communications and so on, the latter enabled by the transistor and computing revolution that enables the internet and all that involves. The author explains this all of this is just another human construct with historical roots, and may have gone too far: it is not irreversible. The main reason for a re-appraisal is the de-industrialisation of North America, Europe, and Japan, with a shift of manufacturing to Asia in general and China in particular. The author suggest globalisation reached a turning point in the mid-2000s.

Chapter 5

Chapter 5 turns to understanding risks. He suggests one can see the advances of modern civilisation as serial quests to reduce the risks that come from us being complex and fragile organisms trying to survive in a world abounding with dangers – reducing the risk of famines and improving health, for example through better hygiene, public health measures and medicine, reducing the risks from contaminated water and food pathogens, increasing transport safety, and so on. There are risks of man-made and natural dangers and risks of diets, diseases, and everyday activities such as smoking. Risk is different and involuntary activities, the latter often involving deliberate exposure to risk. But much fear is a result of risk misperception and misrepresentation, for example in regard nuclear related risk. The author looks at quantifying risks such as homicides and leukaemia, flying and driving, natural hazards such as tornados and hurricanes, and so on. What about risks that could severely damage or even end modern civilisation? Volcanic eruptions or asteroids or nearby supernova are in the running, but of course the one that has recently occurred is the ongoing COVID epidemic, which has caused less deaths than previous flu epidemics, and the one on the way is global climate change.

The author comments that public reaction to risks is more guided by a dread of the unknown than a comparative appraisal of actual consequences. Low-cost measures that can increase life expectancy are often not taken – as in the epidemic of gun violence in the United States. Asking for a risk-free existence is impossible: but the quest for minimising risk remains the leading motivation of human progress.

Chapter 6

Chapter 6 is on understanding the environment: “The only biosphere we have”. (Talk about leaving Earth as a solution is an irrelevant distraction). To ensure our survival without catastrophic decline we need to ensure that our combined interventions do not imperil the long-term habitability of the planet. The author gives

a list of nine critical biosphere boundaries: climate change, ocean acidification, depletion of atmospheric ozone (threatened by release of chlorofluorocarbons), atmospheric aerosols, interference in nitrogen and phosphorus cycles, freshwater use, land use changes, biodiversity loss, and various forms of chemical pollution.

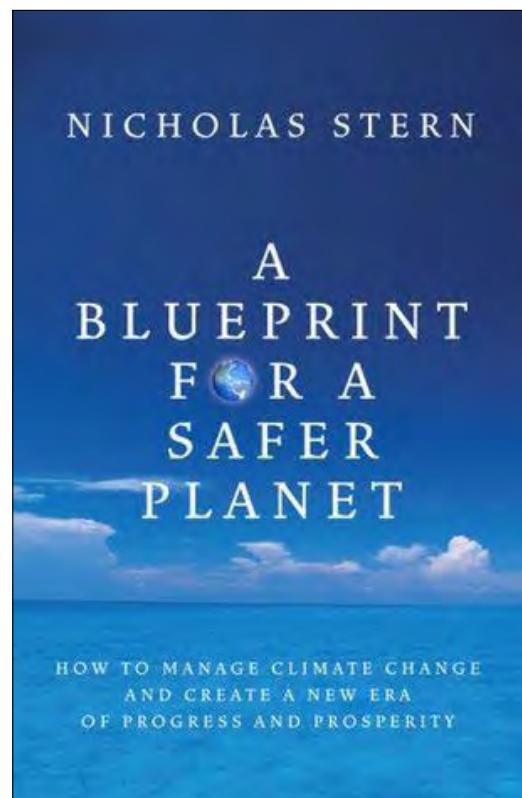
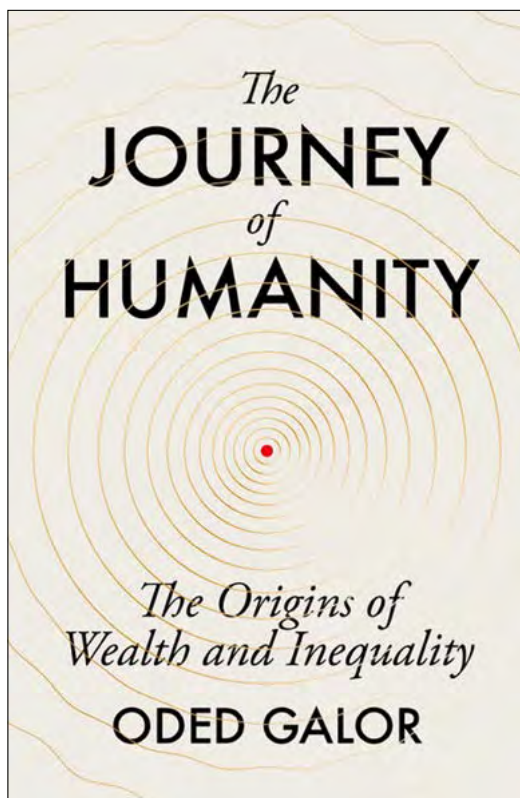
He focuses on just a few existential parameters, vital for our existence: our need for breathing requires oxygen, drinking requires water availability, and eating requires food. Oxygen concentration in the atmosphere is not an issue, despite some nonsense politics about it. Water use is a key problem due to excess water extraction from ancient deep aquifers, serious water pollution generated by food production, cities, and industries, including pumping of raw sewage into rivers and the sea, and enormous waste of water, with highly uneven access. Food production and distribution is a key problem, leading to overgrazing in arid regions resulting in desertification. Huge food wastage is taking place, with major maldistribution. Food production relies heavily on non-renewable energy resources, particularly to provide nitrogenous fertilisers, with a real concern being the consequences of unwanted plant nutrients in water leading to eutrophication and algal bloom.

The greenhouse effect is needed for our existence: there is an existential imperative for regulation of the Earth's atmospheric temperature by a few trace gases, their effect making the difference between a lifeless frozen planet and a blue green Earth, but the balance needed for life has been disrupted by our atmospheric emissions. Action on climate change is an imperative. This is all documented with detailed evidence.

Chapter 7

Chapter 7 is about understanding the future, and the problems of forecasting. Many forecasts are quantitative fables dressed up in fancy ways because they deal with processes whose dynamics are not well understood, and in any case the data used is questionable. Some point in the right direction but with substantial uncertainties. A few deal with processes whose workings are well known and whose dynamics are restricted to a relatively confined set of outcomes. A key example of the latter is demographic forecasts, which offer a relatively narrow range of highly plausible outcomes. By contrast even short-term projections of highly complex systems are very uncertain, and there are many examples of failed predictions, for example runaway population growth, and techno-optimist predictions offering near miraculous solutions to our problems. Prediction of a so-called Singularity is a fantasy. Inertia, scale, and mass limit what will actually happen. Artificial intelligence is not going to solve all our problems. The author gives many examples of successful and unsuccessful predictions, for example related to the recurrent pandemics we have faced.

A realistic appraisal of needs, mechanisms, resources, and costs of all kinds is needed. The author shows the way in this important endeavour. However, he does not deal with another key issue: the origins of wealth and economic inequality. For that, his book should be supplemented by other reading, for example the book *The Journey of Humanity* by Oded Galor. For more detailed plans on how to manage climate change, a good resource is *A Blueprint for a Safer Planet* by Nicholas Stern.



Afterword – Closing the Gap

Wouter Holleman, Eastern Cape Quaker Community

Some days ago, I asked a 4th year university student what she thought was the most critical problem facing South Africa – and she could not give me an answer.

Over the past several weeks more and more criticism has been levelled at the ANC ‘leadership’, most tellingly at the recent at the *Kgalema Motlanthe Foundation Inclusive Growth Conference*, where ANC stalwarts Mcibisi Jonas, Thabo Mbeki, Kgalema Motlanthe and others spoke of the problems that beset South Africa, and offered a variety of ways of addressing these. Mcibisi Jonas spoke as follows:

“I have been preoccupied these past few months with our damaged national psyche. The moral fibre of our nation is in shreds, and we need to be concerned by the violent, selfish, exploitative, and self-aggrandising attitudes that define South African society. The elites and middle class are becoming less and less concerned about the fate of the poor and the growing social crisis in our country. For millions of South Africans, it is becoming harder every day to stay alive and there is a steady erosion of basic human rights where people have no food, no water, no jobs, no security, and no place to live.”

Of the issues he listed was tackling inequality, for which he advocates “expansion of social protection in the short term.”

Some Friends who participated in the PAR group that discussed a Basic Income Grant were of the opinion that government would implement such, others were not. (Instead, the President tried to sneak through more perks for his Cabinet ...)

We all know that South Africa has the highest Gini index in the world, and apparently this government is unwilling and incapable of addressing this. What can we as the Quaker Community of Southern Africa do about this?

There seem to me to be several points to consider to ‘level the playing fields’. First, listen to Nick Hanauer’s TEDTalk at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=th3KE_H27bs, where he explains some of the fundamental flaws in the economic system as practised today, and highlighted in Jennifer Bowler’s article. And, then also please read Jeff Rudin’s article “The smoke and mirrors of greed – what lies hidden in plain sight” in the Daily Maverick of 25 October.

To level the playing fields in Southern Africa, there are a number of choices.

- Increase the minimum wage. From 1 March 2022 this stood at R23.19 per hour. For a normal 8-hour day this amounts to R185.52, and for an average 21-day working month that equals R3895.92. But, as I understand, the lowest-paid workers at supermarket chains like Checkers, are not employed for a full 8-hour day, which also means that they are not eligible for any additional benefits.
- Increase the taxes of the super wealthy and legislate against moving money offshore to tax havens.
- Apply the ‘stakeholder’ concept where every employee of every business becomes a shareholder with a say in management. This is something I learned in an economic course more than 25 years ago! Each salaried employee is given shares in the organisation, a common practice in large corporations in Taiwan, but not widely practised elsewhere.
- And others suggested by Jennifer Bowler.
- Finally, close the gap between the highest and lowest earners in any organisation.

Quakers have done the apparently impossible before: their involvement in abolishing slavery, in reforming prisons, shutting down mount-top coal mining in Pennsylvania in 2014, by targeting the Pittsburgh-based PNC Bank.

What can we – as Quakers – do to CLOSE THE GAP?



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