



Global System Change: A Whole System Approach to Societal Transformation

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Human society is rapidly transforming. Rising climate change, pollution, inequality, and many other environmental and social problems show that we are grossly violating the laws of nature. For 3.5 billion years, any species that violated these laws changed or disappeared. Throughout human history, economic and political systems that violated natural laws often collapsed quickly and traumatically (i.e. American and French revolutions, end of US slavery, and USSR communism).

The transformation of human society is inevitable. But the means of transformation are not. Time is limited. If we quickly align with the laws of nature, humanity can reach unprecedented levels of prosperity. If we do not, nature and reality will drive traumatic change and probably collapse. COVID-19 is just the beginning. Failure to align with the laws of nature will bring more disruptive transformation.

The time is right for a change. The energy to drive it exists in abundance. Pain is a great teacher. Billions of people on Earth are suffering, unable to meet basic needs. We are rapidly destroying life and life support systems. Now is the time to take charge of our destiny, protect future generations and establish a sustainable society.

Societal transformation can be framed up by starting from the present and moving forward or going to the endpoint and looking back. Incremental improvements to fundamentally flawed human systems will not work, especially in our limited time frame. This article uses a whole system approach to clarify the endpoint (sustainable society) and practical means to achieve it. Widespread public demand is essential for voluntary systemic change. Illuminating how humanity can practically achieve an immensely more prosperous future builds hope and demand for societal transformation.

1. Current Transformation Approaches

Many academics and other experts have been researching, developing, and implementing successful transformation and system change approaches for decades. Studying past successes, numerous experts assert that bottom-up approaches are essential. Systems theory experts suggest that while complex, adaptive systems cannot be predicted or controlled, it is possible to learn from and guide them to positive outcomes. Many process experts have developed effective collaborative transformation approaches, frequently using the arts to engage people's hearts and minds.

Other experts suggest that lessons can be learned from successful past societal transformations. Still, others assert that human goals and the means to achieve them are clear, necessary transformation resources are abundant, but effective whole system change theories and processes still are needed.

These ideas and approaches are wise and effective. Whole system thinking shows that they often can be accelerated with supporting strategies. For example, regarding bottom-up or top-down approaches, vested interests often block systemic change. Trying to impose it on them through bottom-up or grassroots strategies frequently yields revolutionary or traumatic change. Effective top-down approaches are not dictatorial. Instead, they often help vested interests to understand that system change is inevitable. Therefore, they are far better off driving voluntary change rather than waiting for the involuntary collapse. Top-down and bottom-up approaches working together can greatly accelerate positive transformation.

Regarding systems theory, there may be an infinite number of ways that complex living systems could evolve. But they are bounded by natural laws. These constraints illuminate the most important aspects of sustainable systems. This in turn greatly facilitates the development of sustainable transition strategies. Regarding collaborative system change and transformation processes, these can be accelerated and made more effective by clarifying system change content. This includes natural law qualities of sustainable systems and the systemic changes needed to achieve them.

Past successes can guide the development of societal transformation theories and processes. But past voluntary, peaceful transformations often were focused on one issue, such as agriculture, the environment, or global governance. There are few if any, examples involving the scale, scope, and pace of transformation facing humanity now. The imminent transformation (voluntary or involuntary) foundationally is one of consciousness, substantially impacting many areas of society and lifestyles.

One of the most important requirements for societal transformation is widespread public energy, desire, and demand for positive change. Clarifying goals and the means to achieve them is essential for manifesting this demand. There is growing unanimity around societal goals, in particular the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). There also is growing consensus about necessary action for achieving them, such as switching from fossil fuels to renewable energy. However, the goals and actions usually are not communicated in a whole system, nature/reality-based context. In addition, proposed solutions usually are focused on addressing symptoms instead of root causes (i.e. reducing fossil fuel use instead of changing the economic and political systems that compel its use).

The numerous, sometimes conflicting nature of societal goals and the many opinions or philosophies about transformation strategies often produce confusion. Combining this with vested interest deceptions intended to block systemic change greatly suppresses public enthusiasm and demand for transformation. Effective whole system approaches catalyze transformative energy and demand by providing clear, simple, compelling visions of a sustainable society and the means to achieve it.

2. Whole System Framing

There are two basic ways to frame up societal transformation—start from the present and move forward or go to the endpoint and look back. This article asserts that the latter is more effective. Humans usually are wedded to current ideas and systems. They learn them in

school and live their whole lives under them. It is frequently difficult to look into the future and imagine substantially different human systems and ways of living. Stepping back and viewing the trajectory of life on Earth helps people to let go of current ideas and systems and see their transitory nature.

Considering the evolution of consciousness on Earth probably is the most effective way to understand human evolution. The whole system book series *Global System Change* introduced a new model of individual and collective human consciousness development. It describes three levels of consciousness—unconscious unity, conscious separation, and conscious unity.

The whole system of nature implicitly operates on unconscious unity. All aspects are balanced and taken into account. Individual plants and animals do not think or reflect about what they do. They are guided by instinct, intuition, and other mechanisms in ways that produce essentially infinite coordination, technological sophistication, and widespread prosperity. The unified results of nature strongly indicate the presence of some type of transcendent unity consciousness. It is extremely unlikely that this resulted from a random activity.

For 3.5 billion years, life on Earth has been constrained by natural laws and operating principles. These are objective, observable requirements for living system success at all levels. Violation of these laws only can exist for relatively short periods. Nature restores balance by compelling compliance with its laws. When these qualities are absent, systems change or die.

Observable laws of nature include seeking balance, not growth, producing no waste, living on renewable resources, equitable resource distribution, widespread cooperation (with limited competition at the individual level), equally valuing generations and species, decentralizing production and governance, and enabling individuals to reach their fullest potential. Implied operating principles of nature include democracy/self-government, equality, full cost accounting, no externalities, and full employment.

Humanity could be thought of as nature's experiment in self-reflection. Apparently, to consciously understand the reality of our unity with each other and nature, we had to first venture through the illusion of separation. When we first began to reflect upon our existence, we apparently perceived ourselves to be separate individuals.

But this is not black and white. It occurred to varying degrees. For example, original people often at least partly retained conscious awareness of unity with nature. However, as the intellect ascended above the intuitive in Western and other societies, the perception or illusion of separation became more firmly established. This phase of collective human development could be called conscious separation. This false perception of reality is the genesis or root cause of essentially all problems facing humanity.

One of the most destructive results of conscious separation is the overvaluing of power and men and undervaluing of wisdom and women. The illusion of separation produced fear that needs would not be met and belief in the need for competition. In this environment, those

with greater physical strength, aggressiveness, and competitiveness (men) often were more highly valued. When power is defined this way, men innately have more power. Women innately have more wisdom when wisdom is defined as empathy, cooperation, whole system thinking, multitasking, relationship skills, and intuitive wisdom. (These generalizations are irrelevant at the individual level because everyone is different. All men and women have power and wisdom.)

Suppressing wisdom and women is a foundational quality of conscious separation. Honoring and teaching wisdom is essential for achieving conscious unity. It will elevate women to a position of true equality with men. Wisdom and power, women and men are different, but equal and essential. Power without wisdom is destructive, as we see in the world today. Wisdom can do nothing without power. Power can do nothing right without wisdom.

The dominant qualities of women are exactly what is needed to reach our next level of development (conscious unity), establish a sustainable society, and live in harmony with each other, all life and nature. If we achieve this state, nature will have become conscious of itself. If we do not emerge from conscious separation, we will disappear and nature will return to unconscious unity.

Unconscious unity refers to the parts of nature. They apparently do not self-reflect. However, as noted, the unified results of nature indicate the presence of some type of transcendent consciousness. The human body models this. Cells in the body apparently do not self-reflect. But the human mind reflects on the whole system of the body.

At our current level of development, we probably cannot prove to others that transcendent consciousness exists. However, people can prove it to themselves through meditation, intuition, and their own inner experience. Many people have tangibly experienced conscious unity. It is possible for humanity to live in this state. When this occurs, we will each be nature reflecting upon its unified self from different points of view (like the human mind reflecting on the unified human body).

Regardless of consciousness, the laws of nature are objective, observable, and easily proven. Abiding by them will completely determine the extent to which humanity survives and prospers on Earth. Short-term, myopic self-interest drives the tragedy of the commons. Destruction of life support systems and the growing pain it causes can compel people to look at the big picture. The rational human mind could understand and act upon the laws of nature, prior to attaining unity consciousness. The survival instinct of conscious separation can initially compel us to abide by these laws. However, over the longer term, achieving conscious unity will be necessary for attaining the level of sustainability and widespread prosperity seen in nature for 3.5 billion years.

Considering the inviolate laws of nature shows the temporary, transitory state of human systems. For example, there are no national borders in nature. Human borders are arbitrary, arising from our illusory, destructive, competitive mindsets. There also is no money in nature. The use of money results from fear and a lack of trust and mutually supportive action. The

dominant monetary system (private sector creation of fiat currency) unfairly concentrates wealth, economically enslaves people, and often prevents them from freely achieving their fullest potential.

From the current perspective, imagining a human society with no borders or money could seem utopian or impossible. This reflects the unsophisticated nature of conscious separation. We often think that our ways are more sophisticated and advanced than those of nature. We frequently are enthralled with our governance structures, financial systems, computers, and blockchains, failing to realize that the technology and sophistication of nature are essentially infinitely greater.

Many people believe that humans are more sophisticated than other creatures because we have self-reflective consciousness. But consciousness and sophistication are two different things. Comparing the technological sophistication and coordination of nature to that of humanity shows that self-reflection made us far less sophisticated than nature. The misperception of superiority results from the illusory individual perspective. It is not logical to compare a freely acting human to an individual nonhuman. As discussed above, there are no independently acting creatures in nature, except for humans. The individual human must be compared to the whole of nature because the individual parts of nature implicitly operate as one interconnected entity. Once we understand and act upon the reality of unity, we have the potential to match the sophistication and coordination of nature.

From the limited human perspective, nature can seem brutal. One creature eats another. But creatures do not take far more than they need (as humans often do), and thereby cause many other individuals to lack resources and go hungry. As a result, nature achieves vastly higher levels of individual and collective prosperity than humanity. Self-reflection, freedom of choice, and independent action do not necessarily produce less sophisticated outcomes. This occurs among humanity due to the illusion of separation. Self-reflection based on the awareness of unity could produce the essentially infinite sophistication and prosperity seen in nature.

Perhaps someday self-reflective consciousness will enable humans to advance beyond nature. But our life-destroying results show that we are not remotely close to this point. Until now, self-reflection has been more of a curse than a blessing. We used the power in an illusory way that brought us close to extinction. But self-reflection gives us the power of choice. We can choose our destiny. We can choose to exit the illusion of separation and enter the reality of unity.

The preceding is not said as a criticism of humanity. We are like children on the path to full development. Judgment does not exist in nature. It is a creation of our limited, fearful consciousness. In nature, there is only abide or not abide by the laws of nature. Not abiding causes death. Abide produces essentially infinite prosperity.

Effective societal transformation strategies must be based on the reality of unity. We do not need to mention that there almost certainly will be no borders or money in sustainable society (except perhaps for vestigial purposes). This goes so far beyond conventional ideas

that it might not inspire action. However, younger generations often seem to be progressing more rapidly to conscious unity. This is indicated by their broader embrace of unity concepts, such as racial equality, environmental sustainability, economic justice, and freedom to follow one's heart.

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Original people also generally better understand the transformation facing humanity. Their culture and worldviews frequently are based on the reality of unity with nature. They watched as Western civilizations living in the illusion of separation ignorantly claimed to be more advanced and unintentionally marched us towards destruction.

Modern ideas frequently suggest that we must protect the environment, implying that we could harm it. This reflects a misunderstanding of our relationship to nature. The environment will adapt, regardless of what we do. It will survive. But we probably will not if we continue to drastically change it. In this sense, we are not the caretakers of the environment. It takes care of us. It is the source of life. It provides our air, water, and food. We are not above nature, as our myopic, unintentionally suicidal religious, economic, and political ideas often imply. We are subordinate to it. We will not survive on this planet unless we recognize our appropriate role in nature and ascend to conscious unity.

From the current perspective, the future of humanity can seem bleak. We have created immense environmental, social, and economic problems. But that is the key. We created them. That means we can uncreate them. Comparing ourselves to nature, we only have reached the tiniest fraction of our potential. We can be nearly infinitely more prosperous than we are now.

Societal transformation does not mean changing everything. The best things will remain the same or improve—fulfilling relationships, love for children and animals, living in strong communities, being in nature, creating and enjoying all forms of art, and doing what one loves.

Attaining conscious unity is returning to reality. At a deep, often unconscious level, we yearn for a connection to and harmony with other people, all life and nature. Why? Because they actually are part of us. We literally are parts of one interconnected system, like cells in the body. The five senses and limited mind create the illusion of separation. This phase of human development is quickly coming to an end.

3. Practical Implementation

Humanity almost certainly has entered the phase of rapid transformation. We might only have five to ten years to resolve major challenges before nature and reality resolve them for us. The illusion of separation produced reductionistic thinking and systems. Flawed economic and political systems compel companies to degrade the environment and society. These systems, and the reductionistic thinking that created them, are the root causes of major challenges. As noted, incremental improvements to fundamentally flawed systems will not work, especially within our limited time frame.

An inspiring new vision of human society and systems is needed to achieve voluntary societal transformation. The SDGs discuss many aspects of a sustainable society. But the goals are human-centric. They are not grounded in the reality of nature. The laws of nature provide a simple, clear vision of a sustainable society. They go beyond human ideas and biases to objective reality. They show what absolutely will occur on Earth, regardless of what humans think, say, or do. For example, we know that equitable resource distribution, extensive cooperation, balance, and widespread prosperity will occur on Earth, as they have for 3.5 billion years. A main question is, will humans be here to experience it?

Global System Change uses the laws of nature to provide a clear, reality-based system change roadmap for humanity. It describes three components—sustainable society, systemic changes, and necessary actions. The laws of nature clarify the most important aspects of a sustainable society. This clear vision illuminates the major systemic changes needed to get there. This in turn clarifies the actions required to bring about these changes.

Three principles can guide systemic changes—emulate nature, implement democracy and abide by the rule of law. The answers to nearly all questions about establishing sustainable economic, political and social systems are shown or implied in nature. Democracy is the only sustainable form of government. It is based on the innate rights to equality and self-government.

The rule of law can be used to frame up economic and political reform, especially in the corporate and financial areas. The principle says that individuals and companies should be free to do what they want, provided that they do not harm others. The primary overarching flaw of economic and political systems is the failure to hold companies fully responsible for negative environmental and social impacts. This is the general mechanism that compels them to cause harm. In competitive markets, not holding companies responsible makes it impossible for them to stop harming society and remain in business. The foundational solution is to hold them fully responsible (i.e. abide by the rule of law).

Achieving these changes requires action in all major areas of society, including government, corporate/financial, and the general public. Only government can enforce the rule of law. In the corporate and financial areas, System Change Investing (SCI) can be used to engage companies and investors in system change. The approach rates companies on system change and uses this research to develop SCI funds. The new paradigm approach

shifts the focus of responsible investing and corporate sustainability strategies from company change and symptoms to system change and root causes.

The people collectively are the most powerful force in society. The clear vision and strategy provided by *Global System Change* can inspire action and demand for positive change. Raising public awareness about the urgent need for change requires many actions, including establishing honest media and empowering education. A critical action is overcoming vested interest-driven divisions and helping citizens to understand and act upon their many common interests.

One of the most important societal transformation strategies involves learning from and building upon success. For example, Jay Bragdon's books, *Companies that Mimic Life* and *Economies that Mimic Life*, analyze the superior sustainability performance of Nordic countries. Through education and culture, they understand that humanity is a sub-system of life. This accurate perception of reality enables them to achieve world-leading levels of prosperity and happiness.

Millions of people around the world are working to improve society. We have all the knowledge, expertise, and resources needed to achieve sustainability and real prosperity. We stand at the dawn of a new human consciousness and civilization. With free will, we can choose our destiny. Let us use it to reach our fullest potential and manifest the wisdom of nature in human society.

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