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SUSTAINABILITY

Sustain: To keep somebody or something alive or in existence – *Oxford Dictionary*

The bottom line is: Is it life-enhancing or not? A terminally ill or comatose patient's life can be "sustained" with the use of life-support equipment, but is that life enhanced thereby?

"Sustainability" is an over-abused phrase. It implies maintaining current conditions indefinitely, whatever the current conditions may happen to be. Is this desirable? Is this natural? Is this life-enhancing?

I believe the desired state to be striving for is "beyond sustainability." No matter which definition is chosen, the phrase "sustainable" has come to be identified with an attitude or approach that merely puts a brake on the current, out-of-control, positive feedback system. Sustainable development? Sustainable yield? Sustainable cities? Sustainability *is* the negative feedback to bring the current system back towards center; but it is not an end in itself. Sustainability, as a concept, is a transition zone from the end of one cycle to the beginning of another. No matter how the enlightened intent of those who attempt to describe their forward evolutionary vision with the term "sustainable," the resulting received communication is merely the acceptance of adjustments to the current system to bring it back more into line with Nature, so that it can be continued into the indefinite future. That's why "sustainability" rings with asceticism to the general public: it means eliminating current behavior, giving up things – reduce, reuse, recycle. *Homo sapiens* will always have resistance to this, and so sustainability (as a paradigm) will never be more than a wake-up call: "This cycle is coming to a close! Better change our behavior so we can "stay alive or even remain in existence!" This is not life-enhancing; this is reproachful anxiety.

That's why I believe the desired state is *beyond sustainability*. Beyond sustainability will be the beginning of a new cycle. In this phase, symbiotic attunement with/as Nature will be matter of fact. There will be no need to convince anyone that if human systems are not modeled after natural systems, then they will not be able to be continued into the indefinite future (But of course! What else *could* it be?). "Beyond sustainability" is the desired state where complete acceptance and realization of this necessary situation has already been collectively integrated. At that point, the word

“sustainable” will become a mute term, reserved for patient prognosis, not desirable conditions of society.

But “beyond sustainability” is a situation that can only occur with the passing of *Homo sapiens*, for *Homo sapiens* never intended to be “sustainable” in the first place; their stage of a planet’s evolution is characterized by the rapid transmutation of the material component and the rapid conversion of natural capital into an arbitrary value structure. The next species of human, already beginning to manifest, will regard as self-evident their unity with Nature (What else *could* it be? Really.). Comfortably immersed in this acknowledgement, acutely aware of their function within the total network of Gaia, they will set about their task: enhancing Life with every act, retarding entropy because of genetic predisposition, enriching the economy of Nature *by design*, without resistance or contention, growing prosperously abundant in those qualities and conditions that make for a healthy, wealthy, long happy life. This is the essence of “beyond sustainability,” and for that reason I will choose **not** to use the word “sustainable” whenever I can.