

## **feasta: The Foundation for the Economics of Sustainability**

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### **CIVILIZING SOCIETIES by David C. Korten**

The Positive Futures Network & The People-Centered Development Forum

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**Without a global revolution in the sphere of human consciousness, nothing will change for the better. . . and the catastrophe toward which this world is headed, whether it be ecological, social, demographic or a general breakdown of civilization, will be unavoidable. - Václav Havel**

On November 30, 1999 some 70,000 union members, people of faith, environmentalists, youth, indigenous peoples, peace and human rights activists, feminists, and others took to the streets in Seattle Washington to express their opposition to the World Trade Organization (WTO). Some called it "The Battle of Seattle" or "The Protest of the Century." Some simply called it "Seattle '99." Courageously standing their ground in the face of the plastic bullets, tear gas, and pepper spray of violent police battalions run amok, the protests played a major role in bringing the WTO negotiations to a stand still. They also focused world attention on an epic struggle between two powerful divergent social forces contesting humanity's future course.

One is the force of corporate globalization being advanced by an alliance between the world's largest mega-corporations and most powerful governments driven by an insatiable quest for financial profit. The defining project of this alliance is to integrate the world's national economies into a single borderless global economy that frees the world's largest corporations to move goods and money freely as they will without governmental intervention. In the eyes of the corporate libertarians, this integration is at once creating the financial resources necessary to end poverty and save the environment, while at the same time increasing human freedom by eliminating repressive governments and spreading democracy throughout the world.

The second force is the global democracy movement advanced by a planetary citizen alliance known as global civil society. Before Seattle '99 this force found expression in the national democracy movements that played a critical role in the breakup of the Soviet empire and the fall of apartheid in South Africa -- and in other great progressive social movements of our time, including the civil rights, environmental, peace, and women's movements. The citizen alliance depends largely on voluntary energy, has no identifiable organizational or institutional form, and is driven by a deep value commitment to democracy, community,

equity, and the web of planetary life. It is in substantial measure a reaction against corporate globalization, which in the eyes of the citizen alliance members is enriching the few at the expense of the many, replacing democracy with an elitist and authoritarian corporate rule, destroying the environment, and eroding the relationships of trust and caring that are the essential foundation of a civilized society -- all to make money for those who already have more of it than they could possibly use. The growing power of the citizen alliance has made members of the corporate alliance sufficiently nervous that they are mobilizing their substantial resources, including the police powers of the state, to suppress or co-opt it.

### **Seattle and the Global Democracy Movement**

When the corporate media presented Seattle '99 as a demonstration against trade, they totally missed the real story. The seventy thousand people who mobilized in the streets of Seattle were not anti-trade, they were pro-democracy -- a part of the growing global democracy movement. They were calling for an end to corporate rule -- of which the WTO is a powerful symbol. Union workers, environmentalists, members of the faith community, feminists, gays, human rights and peace activists and many others joined in common cause out of a realization that unless they came together to work together to build truly a democratic world that works for all, we will have a world that works for no one. It marked an early step toward a grand convergence of progressive forces in America beyond identity and single issue politics toward a politics of the whole.

The convergence reveals some of the deeper changes taking within the individual formations. For example, the call of the churches for Jubilee 2000 -- debt forgiveness for low income countries -- expressed an awakening to the social justice message of Christ's teaching. The call of labor unions for international solidarity revealed a new awareness among working people that in a global economy all workers must be guaranteed basic rights and living wages or none will have them. The alliance of environmentalists and union members marked the realization by both groups that there will be no jobs without a healthy environment, nor will we have a healthy environment unless people have secure jobs and labor rights.

Then there were the youth, the real heroes of Seattle, who put their bodies on the line in the face of brutal police violence to bring the WTO meeting to a stand still. Tired of being manipulated and lied to by a system that is stealing their future -- and awakening to the reality that if they are to have a future they must take the lead in creating a social transformation -- they spent months training one another in the principles and methods of nonviolent direct action and decentralized consensus based self-organization that model the values of the radically democratic societies they intend to build.

While the Seattle protests captured the global spotlight, similar demonstrations against corporate globalization, many far larger in scale, have become common place around the world, with notable examples in Geneva, the U.K. France, Brazil, India, Thailand, and many others. All are manifestations of the global democracy movement, the grand alliance of a globalizing civil society.

These two opposing forces define an epic struggle between popular democracy and the tyranny of corporate globalization. It is in part a class struggle, but it is more than that, because it is also about human institutions that are running beyond the control even of the world's super-elites. It might also be characterized as a struggle between life and money for the soul of humanity -- a struggle between opposing values that stand in stark and irreconcilable conflict. The epic significance of this struggle and its fundamentally cultural -- even spiritual nature -- can only be fully appreciated only by placing it in the context of the grand story of cosmic creation as it is being revealed through a melding of scientific and religious insight.

### **A STORY FOR OUR TIME**

This story begins a very, very long time ago -- perhaps as much as 15 billion years ago -- when a new universe flared into being with a great flash -- dispersing tiny energy particles, the stuff of creation, across the vastness of space. With the passing of time these particles self-organized into atoms, which swirled into great clouds that coalesced into galaxies of countless stars that grew, died, and were reborn as new stars, star systems, and planets. The cataclysmic energies unleashed by the births and deaths of billions of suns converted simple atoms into more complex atoms and melded atoms into even more complex molecules -- each step opening new possibilities for the growth and evolution of the whole.

Each stage transcended the stage before in order, definition, and capacity -- as the drama of creation unfolded. It seemed that a great intelligence had embarked on a grand quest to know itself through the discovery and realization of the possibilities of its being.

More than eleven billion years after the quest began there was an extraordinary breakthrough on a planet later to be known as Earth. Here the cosmos gave birth to the first living beings -- microscopic in size, they were the simplest of single-celled bacteria. Inconsequential though they seemed, they embodied an enormous creative potential and with time created the building blocks of living knowledge that made possible the incredible accomplishments to follow. They discovered in turn the arts of fermentation, photosynthesis, and respiration fundamental to all life. They learned to exchange genetic material through their cell walls to share their discoveries with one another in a grand cooperative enterprise that created the planet's first global communication system -- billions of years before the Internet. And they transformed and stabilized the chemical composition of the entire planet's atmosphere. As the fruits of life's learning multiplied, individual cells evolved to become more complex and diverse.

In due course individual cells discovered the advantages of joining with one another in clusters to create complex multi-celled organisms -- converting the matter of the planet into a splendid web of plant and animal life with capacities far beyond those of any individual cell.

Those among the new creatures that found a niche in which they could at once sustain themselves and contribute to the life of the whole survived. Those that proved unable to find or create their niche of service expired. Continuously experimenting, interrelating, creating, building, the evolving web of life unfolded into a living tapestry of astonishing variety, beauty, awareness, and capacity for intelligent choice.

Then, a mere 2.6 million years ago, quite near the end of our 15 billion year story, there came the most extraordinary achievement of all, the creation of a being with capacities far beyond those of any creature that had come before it to reflect on its own consciousness, to experience with awe the beauty and mystery of creation, to articulate, communicate and share learning, to reshape the material world to its own ends, and to anticipate and intentionally chose its own future. It was the living spirit's most daring experiment -- and a stunning cooperative achievement.

Each of these creatures, humans they were called, was comprised of from 30 to 70 trillion individual living, self-regulating, self-reproducing cells. More than half the dry weight of each human consisted of the individual micro-organisms required to metabolize its food and create the vitamins essential to its survival. All together it took more than a 100 trillion individual living entities joined in an exquisitely balanced cooperative union to create each of these extraordinary creatures.

These new beings -- these humans -- had such potential to contribute to the journey of the whole. Yet their freedom to chose their own destiny carried a risk as it not only gave them extraordinary creative potentials -- it also gave them a great destructive potential. The outcome was tragic. Failing to recognize and embrace their responsibility to the whole they turned their extraordinary abilities to ends ultimately destructive of the whole of life, destroying in a mere 100 years much of the living natural capital it had taken billions of years of evolution to create.

### **The Sanctification of Greed and Oppression**

Some attribute this tragedy to a genetic flaw that doomed humans to the blind pursuit of greed and violence. Yet the vast majority of humans were generous and caring. More compelling is the argument that the ideology of what humans called their Scientific Revolution stripped humans of their sense of meaning, called forth their greed and violence, and made generosity and caring seem somehow naive. This ideology taught that matter is the only reality and that the universe is best thought of as a giant clockwork set in motion at the beginning of creation and left to run down as the tension in its spring expires. It further taught that life is only an accidental outcome of material complexity, consciousness an illusion. Though such beliefs defied logic, denied the human experience, stripped life of meaning, and were contrary to reality they became a foundation of the dominant Western culture.

Thomas Hobbes, a noted philosopher of the Scientific Revolution, elaborated on these flawed beliefs to articulate a theory of human behavior and a moral philosophy that ultimately became the theoretical and philosophical foundation of humanity's dominant economic system. He argued that since life has no meaning and human behavior is determined solely by appetites and aversions, good is merely that which gives oneself pleasure; evil that which brings pain. The rational person seeks a life of material indulgence

unburdened by concern for others. These beliefs became the foundation of a cultural system known as modernism and an economic system known as capitalism.

Though there was much ado about a conflict between scientists and theologians, they actually arrived at a mutual accommodation in many of their core views. In an act revealing of human hubris, the theologians of a Western religious sect known as Christianity had long before created their God in their own image, an elder male with a white beard who ruled a kingdom called heaven. This God was so powerful that by the estimate of the Western religions, he created the cosmos, the earth and all its living beings in a mere six days -- presumably for the sole benefit of the humans he created on the sixth day. On the seventh day, his work thus done, he took a rest.

The main issue on which scientists and theologians were inclined to consequential differences centered on whether or not their God returned after his vacation to tend to the needs of those among the humans he chose to favor. The theologians, especially those of Christianity's Protestant sect, generally believed that God returned to keep a book on who by his rules was naughty or nice, reward the worthy with material abundance, and punish the unworthy with sickness and poverty. Some noted that by this characterization God bore a striking resemblance to a mythical figure human's called Santa Claus.

As God personally determined the fate of each person, those with wealth and power were by definition worthy in God's eyes and the poor and powerless deserved their fate. Thus it was that Western theology affirmed the righteousness of both materialism and political oppression and absolved humans of responsibility for one another and for the earth. Furthermore, since humans were the end product of creation, not an instrument of its continued unfolding it followed that whatever the deficiencies of the world as any individual might find it, it was to be accepted as God's will.

Some believed that God would eventually return to establish peace and justice for all. Others looked to the afterlife for perfection and considered their time on Earth as something akin to a short layover in a cheap hotel on their way to paradise. Either way it was in the hands of a God who resided apart in a far place.

No where was a rejection of human responsibility for the lot of society and nature greater than in the economic system human's called capitalism. One of capitalism's defining features was a consumer culture cultivated by saturating the media with an endlessly repeated message that consumption of an advertised product would bring meaning and love to the empty and lonely lives of the otherwise unworthy. When consumption inevitably failed to substitute for meaning, more consumption was prescribed as the solution. Increasingly the creative energies of the species turned to building institutions dedicated to endlessly increasing consumption through a process called economic growth. Growth became such an obsession that no one seemed to care what was consumed. Nor did they seem to notice that the basic livelihood needs of the many went unmet while a fortunate few gorged themselves on luxuries. Indeed, a privileged minority became so obsessed with the futile attempt to fill their empty lives with stuff they failed to notice that the growth they so prized was destroying the life support system of the planet, the social fabric of the society, and the lives of billions of people.

## **The Money Game**

Even more perverse was the role of what humans called money -- a mysterious kind of sacred number created out of nothing by banks that loaned it into existence. Though most humans gave no thought to where money came from, they were socially conditioned to accept it in exchange for things of real value like their labor, food, land, and shelter. Since money was the ticket that allowed people to accumulate stuff, those who already had so much stuff they didn't know what to do with it, turned their attention to accumulating sacred numbers called money that banks happily stored for them in computers. As this accumulation served no evident purpose, its practitioners turned it into a competitive game in which the winner was the one with the most financial assets. The top players were called billionaires. A well known magazine called Forbes regularly published the current scores and rankings of the top players.

For those who had the means to play, this game became life's purpose. A few of the most dedicated players set about to redesign human institutions to tip the game in their personal favor and thus allow themselves to achieve ever more inflated scores. Those less affluent, but with a bit of extra cash to spare, were encouraged to join in by placing it in the hands of professional gamblers called money managers who traded currencies, bonds, and corporate shares in a great electronic casino called the global financial market. In the course of their play, the money managers moved trillions of dollars around the world at the speed of light, trashing the currencies and economies of hapless countries whose policies displeased them and the share prices of corporations that produced less than the profits they expected. In the wake of their moves whole governments fell and hundreds of thousands lost their jobs -- which the players cheered as examples of capitalism's powers of "creative destruction" of the obsolete and the unproductive.

These corporations were a frightfully perverse sort of legal entity designed to allow the accumulation of massive financial power with little or no accountability for the consequences of its use. Some corporations were served by the labor of hundreds of thousands of people and received millions of dollars in subsidies from government. Yet the law and much of public opinion stipulated that only shareholders were entitled to a voice in management and a share in the profits. Employees were expected to leave their personal values at the door when they reported for work. On the job there was only one value -- shareholder return. Treated as expendable commodities, workers could be fired without notice or recourse. Whole communities were simply abandoned when a corporation found it more profitable to move its operations elsewhere.

To satisfy the insatiable demands of money managers for ever greater profits, corporations rewarded politicians large financial gifts in return for public subsidies and laws granting them special privileges. Tiring of the inconvenience of bribing politicians one country at a time the major players created a new institution called the World Trade Organization -- or WTO. Here unelected trade representatives loyal to corporate interests established international rules that obliged all countries to extend special rights and privileges to all global corporations. Incredible as it may seem, if the WTO decided that a law conflicted with WTO rules, the offending country was obliged to change the law -- even though such action might be contrary to the interests and preferences of its own citizens.

Invariably the rules of the WTO gave corporations ever greater freedom to roam the world converting the living wealth of society and planet into money. They turned the natural living capital of the earth into money by strip-mining forests, fisheries and mineral deposits, producing toxic chemicals and dumping hazardous wastes. They turned human capital into money by employing workers under substandard working conditions that left them physically handicapped. They turned the social capital of society into money when they paid substandard wages that destroyed workers emotionally and led to family and community breakdown and violence. They turned the living trust of public institutions into money by bribing politicians with campaign contributions to convert the taxes of working people into inflated corporate profits through public subsidies, bailouts and tax exemptions.

### **Awakening to the Real World**

Then, as the year 2000 dawned, a remarkable thing happened. Millions of humans started waking up, as if from a deep trance, to the beauty, joy, and meaning of life. They began to reject consumerism and took to the streets by the hundreds of thousands demanding a restoration of democracy, an end to corporate rule, and respect for the needs of all people and other living things. The process of building a new politics and a new consciousness was set in motion. It was, however, yet a tiny spark of hope amidst the destructive forces of corporate capitalism.

Humans are accumulating a growing body of scientific evidence discrediting the old story and its underlying beliefs. Ever more evidence points to the reality that matter exists only as a continuing dance of flowing energies, creation is an ongoing self-organizing process, life is a predominantly cooperative process, and earth's successful species are those that learn to meet their own needs in ways that serve the larger web of life. Perhaps one day they may ponder the larger implications of living in a world in which matter is an illusion and conscious intelligence is the ground from which all else is manifest. Perhaps they will develop a sense of life's profound meaning and come to see themselves as instruments of creation's continued unfolding -- not its end accomplishment. As they seek their place in service to life's journey perhaps they will be inspired to transform their values and institutions in ways that unleash potentials within their being beyond their current imagining. The choice is in their hands.

This story, of course, is our story. And it is our choice whether to continue on our present self-destructive course or set out to transform a global society dedicated to the love of money into a global society dedicated to a love of life -- a truly civil society grounded in a deep shift in cultural values already well underway in the United States and elsewhere throughout the world.

## CULTURE SHIFT

In the United States, the values shift has been given visibility and definition by values researcher Paul Ray and feminist Sherry Anderson, who divide the U.S. adult population into three major cultural groupings.<sup>1</sup>

| CULTURE SHIFT IN AMERICA  |  |   |
|---------------------------|--|---|
| GROUP                     | VALUES   | ADULT AMERICANS                                 |
| <b>Cultural Creatives</b> | <b>Family, community, environment, and feminism, diversity personal growth &amp; spiritual development</b> | <b>50 million (26%) &amp; growing rapidly</b>   |
| <b>Moderns</b>            | <b>Materialism, consumerism, &amp; the drive to acquire money &amp; property</b>                           | <b>93 million (48%) &amp; steady</b>            |
| <b>Traditionals</b>       | <b>Traditional ways of life &amp; gender roles, religious fundamentalism</b>                               | <b>48 million (25%) &amp; declining rapidly</b> |

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1. **The Modernists** -- the largest cultural group in America -- actively prize materialism and the drive to acquire money and property. They tend to spend beyond their means, take a cynical view of idealism and caring relations, and value winners. Commonly champions of capitalism, the power holders in America's most powerful corporate and political institutions commonly come from the ranks of the Moderns. Their numbers are relatively stable.
2. **The Traditionals** want to return to traditional ways of life and traditional gender roles. They tend toward religious conservatism and fundamentalism. They also believe in helping others, volunteering, creating and maintaining caring relationships, and working to create a better society. Their numbers are in rapid decline.

- 3. The Cultural Creatives,** Ray's third group, are a product of the reaction against modernism's lack of authenticity. Its members are distinguished by their embrace of the values of an integral culture, meaning they honor life in all its dimensions, both in their inner spiritual experience and in their outward commitment to family, community, the environment, internationalism and feminism. They have a well developed social consciousness that grows out of their inner spiritual consciousness. Experiencing the potentials of this spiritual consciousness in themselves makes them generally optimistic about the possibilities of humankind.

Most significant in terms of our present discussion, Ray and Anderson report that most Cultural Creatives are activists. The typical Cultural Creative is likely to be involved in several groups working for social change. Furthermore, most social change initiatives in the United States, including those involved in the Seattle protests, are headed by Cultural Creatives -- and their numbers are growing fast. Now 50 million in number in America alone, they are 26% of the adult American population. As recently as the early 60s they were less than 5%.

Cultural Creatives are interested in alternative health-care practices, personal growth and spiritual development, and they are careful, thoughtful consumers. Politically and socially active, they are crafting a new ecological and spiritual world view, a new literature of social concerns and a new problem agenda for humanity. At the same time they are pioneering psychological development techniques, restoring the centrality of spiritual practice to daily living, and elevating the importance of the feminine -- all building blocks of a civil society.

Yet Cultural Creatives remain invisible to the corporate media, which is dominated by modernist values. And their values are unrepresented by a political system that is still defined by the struggles between moderns and traditionalists. Unaware of their own numbers and potential power, most Cultural Creatives feel culturally isolated, out of step with the mainstream, and politically disempowered. To actualize their true potential as a force for change, they must first become visible to one another and to the larger society. For this reason, perhaps the most important consequence of the Seattle WTO protests was the message it sent to Cultural Creatives everywhere in the world that they are not alone in their discomfort with the cultural, economic and political forces of modernism and corporate globalization and their belief in the possibility of creating a better world for all -- even in America, the world center of materialism and corporate arrogance. Many Cultural Creatives found it to be a powerfully energizing moment.

A variety of international surveys reveal that the patterns identified in America by Ray are part of a generalized global trend. The pattern includes a loss of confidence in hierarchical institutions -- including those of government, business, and religion -- and a growing trust in their inner sense of the appropriate. Interest in economic gain is decreasing, while desire for meaningful work and interest in discovering personal meaning and purpose in life is increasing.

Parker Palmer [See Figure 2] provides a simple model suggesting how the culture shift described by Paul and Anderson may ultimately translate into a transformation of American society and institutions. As Paul and Anderson document, the making of a Cultural Creative begins with an awakening to the contradictions of the old culture and stepping out of the old

culture's entrancement. Eventually the disconnect between the inner life and the realities of family, work, and community life still grounded in the old culture becomes so painful that the individual decides, in Parker's words, "to live divided no more." The result is a sense of isolation that can be broken only by forming communities of congruence, that eventually meld into larger alliances that ultimately achieve the power to transform the logic and reward systems of society's political and economic institutions.

### **A Movement Model of Social Change**

- 1. Divided-No-More** - Isolated individuals reach a point where the gap between their inner and outer lives becomes so painful that they resolve to live "divided-no-more." These people may leave or remain within institutions -- but they abandon the logic of institutions and find an alternative center for their lives. The logic of punishment is transformed: no punishment can be greater than conspiring in one's own diminishment.
- 2. Communities of Congruence** - Isolated individuals discover each other and form groups. These groups sustain people's sense of sanity in a world where the divided life is regarded as safe and sane. Through these groups, people gain an experience of leadership and efficacy. A fragile private language develops that begins to grow strong enough to enter the public realm.
- 3. Going Public** - The words, images, and symbols originating in the communities become more visible, and converts are gained. Critics are also gained -- the movement is scrutinized and must be clarified and refined. Leaders within the movement become public leaders.
- 4. Alternative Rewards** - The energies that began by abandoning the logic of institutions come full circle to alter the logic of institutions. Movements develop alternative reward systems. Some are external (jobs, income, status, visibility, colleagues) and some are internal. The logic of rewards is transformed: no reward can be greater than living "divided no more."

Parker Palmer. From *YES! A Journal of Positive Futures*, Winter 1998/1999, p. 47

Day by day the process described by Palmer is gaining strength and clarity -- creating within humanity the potential to take the step toward the creation of a new civilization -- a civil or civilized society -- grounded in values of peace, cooperation, compassion, freedom, and responsibility to the whole that have inspired idealistic visionaries since the dawn of human history.

The term civil society that came into current use with the emergence of the pro-democracy movements in Eastern Europe and is now a center piece of the global democracy movement traces back to ancient Greece and Aristotle's concept of a politike koinonia or political community, later translated into Latin as Societas civilis, or a civil society. For Aristotle the civil society is an ethical-political community of free and equal citizens of good and responsible character who by mutual consent agree to live under a system of law that expresses the norms and values they share. As the law is a codification of their shared cultural values by which they have chosen to live, it becomes largely self-enforcing -- maximizing the freedom of the individual and minimizing the need for coercive state intervention.

In our contemporary context the term civil society is appropriately used in two ways -- to distinguish the civil society to which we aspire from the uncivil capitalist society in which we live and to identify the civil society organizations and movements that are working for social transformation toward the creation of a planetary civilization comprised of strong and vital civil societies.<sup>2</sup>

### CIVIL OR CAPITALIST?

| <b>THREE SPHERES OF COLLECTIVE LIFE</b> |   |   |
|---|---|---|
| <b>SPHERE</b>                           | <b>FUNCTION</b>   | <b>POWER</b>  |
| <b>POLITY</b>                           | <b>Set &amp; enforce rules governing relationships between members of society</b> | <b>Threat: Monopoly of coercive police and military power</b> |
| <b>ECONOMY</b>                          | <b>Produce and exchange valued goods and services.</b>                            | <b>Exclusionary: Control over access to means of living</b>   |
| <b>CULTURE</b>                          | <b>Define values, symbols, and beliefs that provide meaning and identity</b>      | <b>Normative: Determine what is valued and legitimate</b>     |

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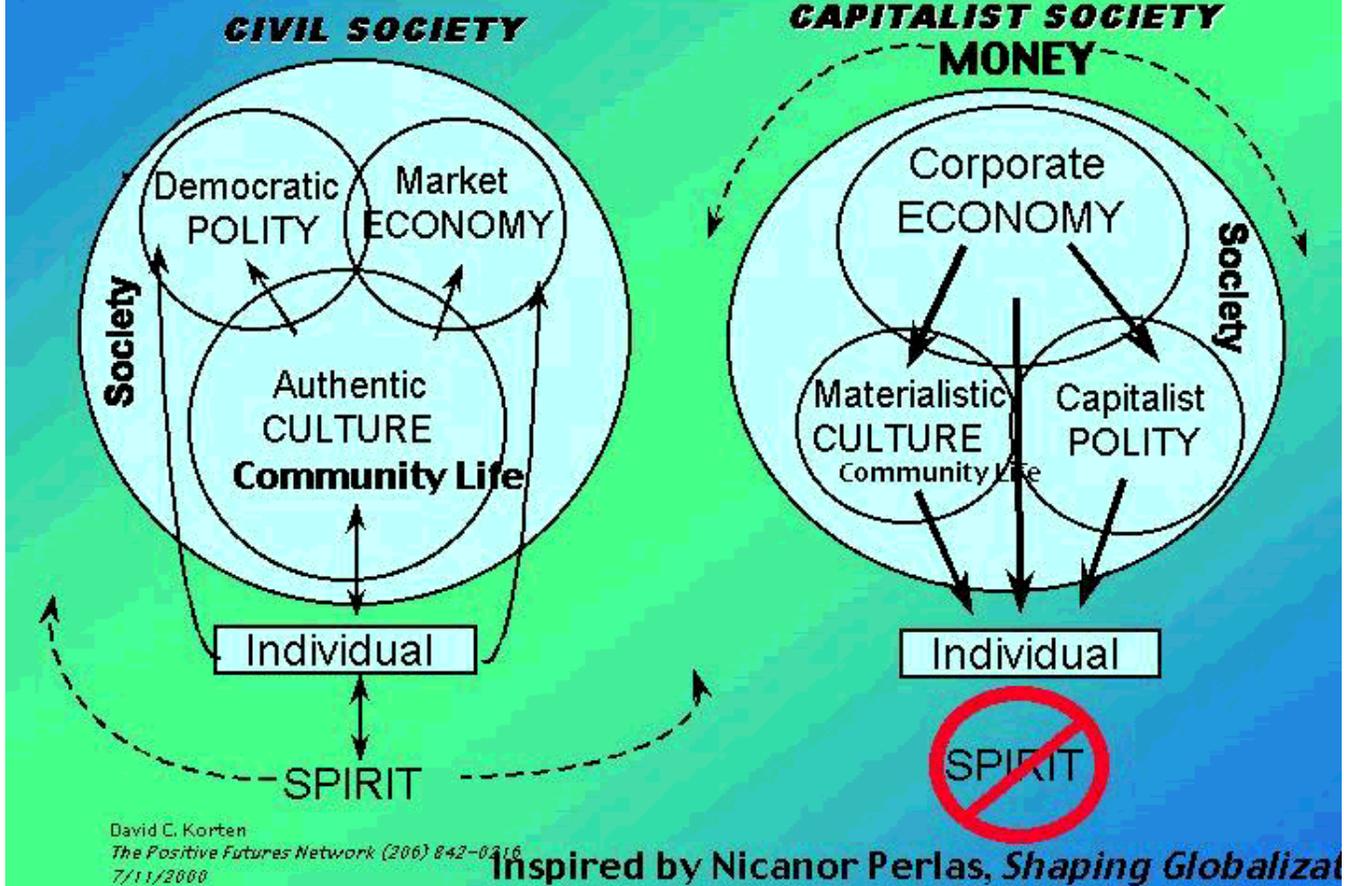
The defining political struggle of the 21st century is not so much between political ideologies as between life values and financial values -- between a civil society and a capitalist society. The differences may be summarized in terms of the relationship between three spheres of collective activity: polity, economy, and culture.

- **Polity** is the sphere in which a society's rules are formalized and enforced regarding the rights and obligations that govern relationships among its members. Polity holds the threat power inherent in its monopoly over police and military power.
- **Economy** is the sphere that organizes the production and exchange of valued goods and services. Economy holds the exclusionary power inherent in its ability to control access to both the means of living and material comforts.
- **Culture** is the sphere in which the society defines the values, symbols, and beliefs that are its sources of meaning and identity. Culture holds the normative power to determine what is valued and to legitimate the institutions and power resources of polity and economy. Though cultural power may seem weak compared to the powers of coercion and exclusion, it is ultimately the decisive power in any society, for it is the foundation on which the legitimacy of all other power resources rests, including those vested in the formal institutions of polity and economy.

The stark contrast in values and institutions that distinguish a civil society from a capitalist society can be simply illustrated in relation to these three spheres of collective activity, as in Figure 4. The civil society is built on a foundation of spiritual values that permeate its culture. Personal and institutional relationships are defined by the self organizing flow of the spiritually grounded life energies of its members. The processes of cultural regeneration are grounded in the rich and dynamic community life and authentic inner spiritual experience of each of the society's members. The result is a rich and dynamic authentic culture grounded in life affirming values.

In the civil society the institutions of polity and economy are mindfully structured by its citizens to reflect and nurture the life-affirming values, symbols, and beliefs of the authentic culture. An active citizenry is engaged in constant vigilance to assure that the institutions of polity and economy function as their servants, not their masters. They will insist that the institutions of polity be radically democratic in terms of openness, equity, active citizen participation, and consensus-oriented decision making. Similarly, they will demand that the institutions of economy function on the principles of self-organizing markets with the primary goal of providing productive and satisfying livelihoods for all while maintaining a balanced human relationship with the non-human environment. We might thus expect the economy to be comprised primarily of local enterprises and to vest in each individual a share in the ownership of the productive assets on which their livelihood depends. The civil society is radically self-organizing and predominantly cooperative in the manner of all healthy living systems, and seeks to maximize the opportunity for each individual to fully and freely develop and express their creative potential in service to the whole of life. Thus a civil society differs on every dimension from the capitalist economy in which we currently live.

## CIVIL OR CAPITALIST?



In the capitalist economy money is the defining value and the primary mediator of the relationships among persons and institutions. The whole of public life is dominated by global financial markets that value life only for its liquidation price. Using money as an instrument of control, the capitalist economy co-opts the life energies of each individual and directs them to the task of replicating money as the defining purpose of capitalist society.

The control of productive resources is consolidated in global mega-corporations answerable only to the managers of huge investment funds who in turn are answerable only for the financial returns produced on their portfolios. The wages of working people are suppressed to increase the returns to those who already command vast financial holdings. Economic affairs are centrally planned by the heads of corporations that command internal economies larger than those of most states. Through their ownership of mass media, influence over school curricula, commercialization of the arts, and mass advertising global mega-corporations dominate the processes of cultural regeneration -- creating a global mono-culture grounded in values of materialism and consumerism that strengthen corporate legitimacy and alienate each individual from their inner spiritual life so that corporate logs become the individual's primary source of identity and meaning.

Similarly, the dominant corporations use their massive financial power and control of the

mass media, corporate think tanks, public relations firms, and pseudo citizen front groups to control the institutions of polity -- buying politicians and dominating public discourse to create a grossly distorted one dollar one vote democracy. All but a tiny elite are deprived of a meaningful political voice and alienated from the political process.

Spiritually impoverished and pressed into a struggle for survival, those deprived of both political voice and an adequate means of livelihood become increasingly indebted to a system that demands they devote ever more of their life energies to its imperatives. Ideals of equity are out the window and individual freedom becomes largely illusory.

Destructive of both life and spirit, the capitalist economy must be considered a social pathology. Even its apparent capacity to create vast wealth is largely illusory, as while it produces ever more glitzy gadgets and diversions, it is destroying the life support systems of the planet and the social fabric of society -- and thereby impoverishes the whole of humanity. Its institutions function as cancers that have forgotten they are part of a larger whole and seek their own unlimited growth without regard to the consequences.

### **CULTURAL FOUNDATION OF CHANGE**

It is a powerful testimony to the reality and power of humanity's spiritual nature that millions of people all around the world are waking up from the cultural trance into which they have been lulled by capitalism's relentless siren song of material indulgence. They are at once protesting in the streets, fighting for the rights of the disenfranchised, rebuilding local economies and creating new political parties -- all the while expanding and melding together their enclaves of civility. They are at once engaged in the globalization of civil society and the civilizing of global society -- creating an increasingly powerful self-organizing, bottom-up process of cultural and institutional transformation only partially understood even by its leaders.

Accustomed to thinking about such matters in political terms, it is easy to overlook the essential cultural foundations of the struggle. While the institutional and class elements of the tyranny to which our species has fallen are very real, it is maintained by a misappropriation of values and world view that is predominantly cultural in nature. It seems that while we have the freedom to experiment with many ways of organizing ourselves, in the end there is something deep within us that compels us to resist the dehumanizing restraints of tyranny in all its many forms. One by one, we are now awakening to the reality of the cultural tyranny that threatens not only our freedom of mindful choice, but our very survival. It begins with the struggle to regain our cultural power by breaking free from the deadening trance of a cultural conditioning that alienates us from life's underlying spiritual reality.

The nature of this struggle is revealed in the fact that it is led not by hate filled revolutionaries seeking to destroy the old order by force of arms, but by those whose hearts are bursting with the love of life and a sense of unrealized possibilities, who work for change through active nonviolence, and who welcome to their ranks those of the old order who find they can live divided no more. Its energy is predominantly a feminine energy, reminiscent of the thesis of Riane Eisler and other feminist scholars regarding the prevalence of feminine energies underlying the peaceful egalitarian partnership cultures that thrived in much of the world before the forceful imposition of the more masculine energies of dominator cultures.<sup>3</sup>

It is an authentic cultural revolution of the sort that cannot be imposed by force of arms or engineered through instruments of propaganda, for it flows from a deep inner consciousness, the wellspring of the human spirit.

It is this spiritual and cultural awakening, as documented by Ray, Anderson and other researchers, that drives the civilizing forces that are finding their most visible expression in the global democracy movement through its active resistance to corporate rule and its efforts to demonstrate viable alternatives to corporate globalization. The deeper work however, is cultural -- the need to advance the consolidation of these cultural forces by increasing the self-awareness among Cultural Creatives that they are part of a large and growing social force, helping them to find and engage with other Cultural Creatives, and facilitating alliance building to meld the existing islands of civility into an irresistible force for cultural, and ultimately institutional, change. As the new cultural formation becomes more visible its expansion will surely grow through its appeal to disaffected moderns and traditionalists.

Herein lies an important insight for movement leaders. True political and economic power must be built on the foundation of cultural power. Cultural consolidation remains the most important political work of the moment. The most successful political acts will be those that facilitate their consolidation. Claiming the cultural mainstream may be more nearly in reach than even the most optimist of us presently imagine. Once this is accomplished, transformation of the institutions of polity and economy to complete the civilizing of society will naturally and inevitably follow.

The ability to choose is one of the defining characteristics of life. As a species we find ourselves confronted with the most profound of choices -- either we must take the step to a new level of understanding and function in service to the whole of life or to risk our own extinction. We face the collective necessity and opportunity to consciously and intentionally reinvent human society within the next twenty to thirty years -- a creative challenge without precedent. This is why I believe this to be the most critical and exciting moment in all of human history. The great struggle between humanity and its institutions -- between a culture of life and a culture of money -- is far from resolved and the outcome is not preordained. But let us hope that Aristotle's dream of a truly civil society -- a dream shared by countless millions throughout human history -- is an idea whose time has finally come.

## NOTES

1. Paul H. Ray and Sherry Ruth Anderson, *The Cultural Creatives: How 50 Million People Are Changing the World* (New York: Harmony Books, 2000).
2. The term civil society is often used inappropriately to refer to all not-for-profit, nongovernmental or third sector organizations. Since many third sector organizations, such as industry associations and nonprofit service providers, are not engaged in advancing a vision of a civil society such usage diminishes an otherwise richly meaningful term to describe a much more distinctive phenomenon that has no other name, and in my view is inappropriate.
3. Riane Eisler, *The Chalice & The Blade* (San Francisco: HarperSan Francisco, 1987).