



An institutional approach to sustainable marketing

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In the beginning

Recognition of the relationship between marketing practices and the environment first appeared in the early 1970s. There was, at that time, a flurry of research on various aspects of the relationship as it was then understood. While the intention was to incorporate environmental principles into the marketing process, little was accomplished in making the intention a reality. The focus of these efforts was on identifying environmentally concerned (green) consumers who would be willing to pay a premium for environmentally sensitive products. At the same time, behaviours related to the marketing process were examined as well. The primary focus here was on recycling behaviour that was then suggested to move industrial societies towards environmentally benign behaviour. 'Consume green products and then recycle the waste and the environmental problem will begin to disappear' was the main marketing message in this era. The one notable exception to this mantra was George Fisk's work on socially responsible consumption. His message went unheeded, however.

Moving into the 1980s, the marketing trend began to shift a bit as conservation began to emerge as a necessary consumption behaviour. Here was the first recognition that the quantity of consumption may be a bigger issue than the quality of consumption. Green products are, after all, still products that require resources for their construction, movement, use, and disposal. While each individual product may be say 10 per cent less resource intensive, if consumption is increased by 12 per cent, the incremental environmental consequence is negative. The psychological message consumers seemed to be hearing at the time was, 'If I buy green and recycle, I can buy as much as I want'.

With the resurgence of the market mentality reinforced by both Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan during the 1980s, the message being proffered to consumers was consistent with the message they wanted to hear, 'Buy more, and the environmental problems will disappear.' The environmental problem was redefined within the emergent philosophy now referred to as neoliberalism. That philosophy can be characterized as the belief that free markets can and will solve all problems including those related to environmental degradation. This was a clear indication that marketing practices of the time were well within the constraints of environmental limits. The economic argument was simple and appealing. If the economies of the world continue to grow, increased profits of corporations will result in increasing tax bases for countries. The increased taxes would be used to repair environmental damages caused by economic growth. In the end, we can literally 'eat our cake and have it too'. As a demonstration of this effect, proponents of consumption growth pointed to the US as an example of the positive effects of the neoliberal philosophy. For, indeed, by commonly used measurement tactics, it could be demonstrated that, since the 1950s, deforestation and the accumulation of pollutants had declined in the US. But euphoria has a nasty habit of receding quickly.

The infamous wager

Even before marketers awakened to the plight of the environment and its potential human consequences, biologists had been raising serious doubts about the trajectory of the global environment. Two notable figures appear here. The first is Rachel Carson whose 1962 book, *Silent Spring*, first documented environmental degradation and traced it unequivocally to human industrial activity. This was followed in 1968 by Paul Ehrlich's, *The Population Bomb*, in which world population growth rates were argued to be excessive and would soon lead to both environmental and human population collapse. This Malthusian argument did not resonate well with either citizens or politicians at the time because, as we all knew, Malthus was wrong. But it did raise the question of what might happen if Malthus were not completely wrong. As a result, trouble began brewing in consumer paradise at the same time that marketing was opening up the new world of unrestricted consumption possibilities (so long as we recycle). Outside the fields of marketing and economics, the shroud of doubt was being cast over the cornucopian assumption of limitless growth as both possible and desirable. Thus, at the same time marketers were touting the advantages of green marketing strategies, systems engineers were unknowingly challenging the

very core of the marketing philosophy. This challenge was developed around Herman Daly's Impossibility Theorem that said you cannot have infinite growth in a finite system, and, while the earth may be large, it is finite.

But we need not worry yet because the limits to growth hypothesis, as reflected in the highly controversial book, *Limits to Growth* (1972), published by the Club of Rome, was easily deflected by a flurry of criticism from the bastions of the industrial status quo. The acrimonious debate that ensued became the stuff of academic legend and resulted in the infamous wager alluded to in the section heading above. One of the many critics of both the limits to growth and the population bomb was cornucopian economist Julian Simon who countered with *The Ultimate Resource* in 1981. In this volume, he argued that human intelligence was the ultimate resource, and that the more people there were, the more permutations and combinations of intelligent solutions there would be to solve problems. He essentially argued that there could not be too many people on the earth. He then challenged Ehrlich to a wager in which Ehrlich could pick any 10 resources he wanted and Simon would bet \$1,000 each that in 10 years, the price for each resource would have declined. Ehrlich lost all 10 bets because he failed to consider the possibility (now a certainty) that markets 'would not get the prices right'. He essentially assumed that markets were competitive and efficient and that technology was fixed. We now know all of this to be false. In a subsequent proposal, Ehrlich agreed to bet again regarding human welfare measures but under conditions whereby market inefficiencies would not affect the result. Simon refused, which suggests that there were no foolish children in his family.

Now the reader may be asking, 'What does this have to do with sustainable marketing?' The answer is, of course, everything. In the case of marketing practice, our vision has been much too simplistic, and in the case of the wager, much too polemic. First, we must expand our scope within marketing to get at the root causes of environmental degradation and not confuse symptoms of problems with the problems themselves. This is not to suggest that symptoms are not important in their own right, but to understand that alleviating symptoms is a short-term solution that has longer-term consequences. As for the polemical nature of the debate, we must come to a common ground from which to address the structural flaws in modern industrial societies. These are flaws in our behaviour that are caused by flaws in our thinking. This is a critical factor because, as Einstein once said, you cannot solve the problems you have created with the same thinking you used to create them. This turns the sustainability problem back on Western industrial societies whose dominant logic has, for four centuries now, led us into the predicament in which we now find ourselves. As cartoonist Walt Kelly's character, Pogo, informed us on Earth Day 1971, 'We have met the enemy, and he is us'. But we must also not demand perfection out of chaos. There is no utopian ideal to move towards as we are currently witness to the failure of the liberal utopia of the Enlightenment. And as was suggested by Isaiah Berlin through Kant, from the crooked timber of humanity, nothing straight can ever be built (Berlin, 1959).

The sustainable society is the noble goal to which we aspire, but we may not like the path that we must ascend. Sustainable marketing may well look nothing like marketing as it is now practised when we search beneath the assumptions of modern market societies and find them vacuous. The problem is framed well in an

old joke about asking questions. A gentleman is driving his convertible a bit too fast on a crooked highway. He fails to navigate a sharp curve and veers off the highway and over a cliff. Half way down to the rocks below he sees and grabs a branch sticking out from the cliff. It saves his life temporarily as the car continues down to the rocks below, crashes and explodes. Hanging from the branch, he looks up to the top of the cliff and realizes he cannot go up and then down to the rocks below which are certain death. Realizing his predicament, he first becomes concerned and then religious. He looks up to the heavens and asks, 'Is there anyone up there?' A voice, sounding not unlike Charlton Heston, comes booming down and says, 'Have faith: let go of the branch'. He looks to the burning car and the rocks below and says, 'What?' The voice repeats, 'Have faith: let go of the branch'. He looks down at the rocks below and then back up to the heavens and asks, 'Is there anyone else up there?' This is the predicament of sustainable marketing. We must now ask questions to which we may not like the answers.

The questions

While it may sound trivial at first glance, we must first ask what sustainability is. The Brundtland Commission (1987) provided the definition most often suggested. To be sustainable is 'to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'. While this seems clear, closer examination reveals some problems with it. The first relates to the needs of the present. There is no indication of what level of needs we are talking about. This is a marketing problem. The second question relates to the future. How far into the future do we look, and how do we know what their needs will be? This is an ethical question that is referred to as intergenerational justice. Both the marketing and the ethical questions must be delineated much more clearly than the definition of sustainability implies. Because humanity now finds itself 'hanging from the branch' in the story above, we must now ask the questions and be prepared to deal with the answers. The old answers, framed in the idiom of green marketing, no matter how comfortable they make us feel, are facile and insufficient. We must not lose sight of the admonition of Thomas Paine, author of *Common Sense* and contributor to both the American and French revolutions, that the long habit of not thinking a thing wrong creates the superficial impression that it is right. Within the context of sustainability, what is it that we have thought 'not wrong' for so long that we now think it is right?

How did we get here?

Western industrial societies have a long tradition of Enlightenment thinking that has carried them to heights of material abundance that were undreamt of even

by the strongest proponents of liberalism during that period. There are two constructs in the previous statement that lead us to the sustainability problem because they form both the antecedents for and the outcome of marketing practices. These are respectively, liberalism and material abundance or, in more common terms, economic growth through free markets. These cannot reasonably be separated from each other. This was the position of Adam Smith in *The Wealth of Nations*, and it remains the underlying philosophy of Western, market-based societies. Stiglitz's controversial book, *Globalization and its Discontents*, argues that it is this philosophy that is being exported in the globalization process because it is still believed within neoclassical economics that liberal principles lead to economic growth and, hence, enhanced societal well-being. It does appear, historically, that material abundance has only been achieved in societies that are imbued with liberal philosophy. So what is this philosophy that pervades Western societies, and why is it believed to be the basis for enhancing the well-being of the world?

Political changes

Political liberalism was legitimized by John Locke in the late seventeenth century. There are three specific aspects of political liberalism that are critical to the sustainability problem and to marketing practice. These are possessive individualism, private property and limited democratic government. Possessive individualism characterizes individuals who are separate from their society and in possession of themselves. While, to the contemporary student of society, this proposition seems self-evident, such was not the case in Locke's time. During the feudal period and before, the concept of an individual separate from the social group was virtually unthinkable. From Locke onward, however, the politically and socially unencumbered individual was the starting point of politics. The possessiveness aspect of the construct is tied to the concept of private property that was also legitimized, though not created, by Locke. He reasoned in the *Second Treatise on Government* that because individuals were in possession of themselves, all they attached their labour to became rightfully theirs. In addition, because the two limitations on accumulation (spoilage and availability) had been resolved in his analysis, the secular limitations on accumulation were removed. Not only was accumulation of property acceptable, it became a virtue (though the church at the time did not agree with this). This has been referred to as the environmentalist's nightmare because it opened the door to the unlimited accumulation of property. Finally, the only legitimate power of the government was to enforce contracts made in the market and to protect property, including property in one's self. Beyond this responsibility, the government was not allowed to go. With these three conditions, atomistic individuals, private property, and unconstrained pursuit of one's interest legitimated, the door was open for the exponential expansion of market society and the full integration of capitalism, though neither would be fully developed for another century or more.

Economic liberalism

With the background conditions in place, it took less than a century for economic liberalism to arrive through Adam Smith. Here, atomistic individuals, each independent of the others, would pursue their personal interests unconstrained by external forces, that is the government, in free-market relationships. The essence of free markets was powerlessness, and this fitted neatly into the political limits legitimated by Locke. The legitimation of markets as the mechanism through which societies' resources would be allocated was completed and the door was now opened for the de-politicization of society. For the classical economists, how this process played itself out regarding wealth and its politically laden distribution was important, but with the development of neoclassical economics still prevalent today, distribution of wealth became a moot issue. This is an example of de-politicization. Rather, the primary issue of economics now is the satisfaction of consumer preferences *as they exist*. It is assumed that such preferences exist within the individual and are not affected by market processes. It is also assumed that all consumer preferences are equally valid requiring no justification by the consumer, and as this market process plays out, society is the beneficiary of individual choices in the market. Thus, it is assumed that the sum of individual choices always results in the common good. This is the function of the invisible hand that guides all exchanges. This should raise immediate questions about what constitutes the common good, but it has not until recently.

The difficulty that must be addressed here is the underlying assumption in marketing practice that all consumer preferences should be satisfied so long as this can be done at a profit and the preferences do not violate laws regarding behaviour. For example, in some societies the sale of addictive drugs, human chattel, and sexual favours is prohibited reflecting the norms of the particular culture. Beyond these few restrictions, market functionaries are charged with the satisfaction of any needs consumers may have. This is the essence of the marketing concept found in the first chapter of virtually all marketing texts, albeit with some restrictions in green marketing texts. Consumers know best what they need, and it is not for the government or marketers to tell them that they should not desire it. This is the market outcome for a political condition known as procedural neutrality that mandates that governments must not favour any particular market outcome over any other. Political policies are developed that allow each individual to pursue 'the good' as he or she sees it. Government cannot proffer or favour any particular version of the good.

Technological rationality

Within this framework of political and economic liberalism, marketing practices have evolved as they now appear. The only remaining background condition is the means by which consumer preferences are satisfied. Here we must address technology as a system of preference satisfactions. In this instance, markets are a technology in that they are a system of organizing and integrating

the necessary constituents of the production process. Marketing has been referred to, for example, as a 'provisioning technology'. But we must also examine the promiscuous nature of technology, as it can be used for many purposes with consequences beyond those intended. Science and technology as we now construe them arrived through the Enlightenment beginning most notably with Francis Bacon. What is clear in his work is that science has an overriding purpose and that is liberation from the 'inconveniences of man's estate.' By this he meant making life easier and better and less subject to the vagaries of nature. While we still often hear of science for its own sake, this is a more Aristotelian view. What is virtually indisputable is that technology, united with industry in the modern period, has allowed industrial societies to attain levels of existence in which material needs have been satisfied for the majority of people. This has not been without unintended consequences, however.

Because of the ubiquity of technology in modern society, a new rationality has evolved that has technology as its basis. Every marketing text is a product of this process because they rationalize the marketing activities. This means that the text is deconstructed in a rational way using what is essentially the scientific process in which the marketing function is broken down into its pieces. Each piece of marketing activity (the 4 Ps) is broken out and examined separately and then reconstituted. We have similarly rationalized the consumer and markets. In the early 1970s, Fisk proposed a holistic approach to marketing that was soundly rejected by the market.

This technological rationality privileges means over ends in the pursuit of material progress and redefines the criteria of success within the language of technology: efficiency, objectivity and measurement. While technology has achieved considerable (though not complete) success in the mastery of external nature, its project to master internal nature has failed. As a result, technological advance has been one-dimensional, prompting Thoreau, in *Walden*, to characterize it as 'improved means to unimproved ends' while numerous others in the Romantic tradition lamented the 'disenchantment of nature'. Now, technology mediates both nature and culture. Through economic and technological rationality, nature has been separated from humankind, ethically, intellectually and spiritually. Nature has only instrumental value in the pursuit of material progress through economic growth and development. The inherent value of nature has receded because nature is now characterized scientifically as inert matter in motion. This is represented in the shift from the organic to the mechanical world view begun more than 500 years ago. This resulted in a new view of nature which, in combination with political and economic transformations, became a new paradigm of Western society.

From the standpoint of cultural mediation, technology has resulted in the trans-mogrification of both individual and social relations. This is because, while technologies are providing solutions to specific problems, they are also creating new 'forms of life' in their wake. In effect, technological change brings with it a social contract, the terms of which are opaque to the participants. They only become evident after they have taken effect. Technology has the potential to free individuals from the hardships of life, but it can also lead to conflicts between what we want

in this regard and what we get. To reconcile the conflicts between humans and the conflict between humans and nature, rational reflection is required. This is made more difficult because the market process has framed the conflict in such a way that reflection on the conditions of technology appears to be irrational. Who, within the technological milieu, would challenge the technological progress of the last four centuries? Its benefits are clear and its development came through the market process itself as a series of ostensibly free, independent, efficient and progressive choices. Because the market is itself such a transformational technology of choice, critics are characterized as making a choice against choice, and this is irrational and inconsistent. Technological society is reduced to a 'regime of instrumentality' that carries its own truths within itself as it provides the questions and the answers in its own idiom. This makes it virtually immune to critique.

The combination of economic and political liberalism and technological rationality creates the basis of the paradigm of Western industrial society. While proponents of the sustainable society have called for a new organizing paradigm based on different principles (the New Environmental Paradigm or NEP), the transformation has been slow in coming because of the nature of paradigms themselves. To see why this is and how it relates to sustainable marketing, we must understand what paradigms do and how they work. More importantly, however, we must know how they change.

The new paradigm

While the characteristics of the New Environmental Paradigm (NEP) have been developed and proffered as the solution to the sustainability problem, they are in stark contrast to the characteristics of the dominant social paradigm (DSP) that still prevails in Western societies. It is important that we ask why both the NEP and sustainable marketing practice remain, according to critics, on the distant horizon. One long-time proponent of sustainability, James Speth, captures this idea in the title of his recent (2008) book: *The Bridge at the Edge of the World*. His metaphor is illuminating as it suggests that we are on the precipice staring into the abyss with no way across. His bridge is a new paradigm. Why is this so? Why, after 35 years, do we still not see the true constraints on sustainability? Is the human race a prime candidate for the infamous Darwin Award given to those who contribute most directly to their own extinction? Or are we faced with a problem that is much more complex and intractable than we think? I think the appropriate question is the last one.

Paradigms exert tremendous influence in the daily lives of the cultures they inform. They are the collection of values, attitudes, beliefs and institutions of a society. Each society has a paradigm that is, for it at least, dominant in its influence. It determines what we see in the world when we look, how we see it, and how we evaluate what we see. Thus, the DSP of a society represents its world view.

It is important, however, to understand that the paradigm is not dominant because it was agreed upon by the majority of people. Rather, it is created by the

dominant class who use it to justify and legitimize the prevailing institutions in society. Because these are the institutions that support the agenda of the dominant class, the DSP functions as ideology. As described above, the central institutions of the DSP of Western industrial societies are political and economic liberalism and technological rationality. Thus, it is the consequence of Enlightenment thought going back 400 years.

It should be noted that the concept of institutions as used here is much broader than that typically used in marketing. Institutions refer to stable systems of social rules that control social interaction, and as such, they control the way we think, what we think about, and how we make judgements and evaluations, that is what is good and what is not. How we evaluate is a direct function of the criteria by which we evaluate. A criterion can be very general such as whether it is based on the reason for doing something or on the consequence of having done it. Is something evaluated as good because it was done for the right reason or because it achieved the right outcome? If the latter is the case, then the paradigm also provides the criteria by which we evaluate whether the outcome is good or bad. For a particular marketing decision, for example, was the decision good because it resulted in more profit than any other decision or because it benefited more people? Any principles of marketing text will give you the answer to this in the first chapter. The marketing concept tells us that the function of marketing is to satisfy consumer needs (as we find them) at a profit. There is nothing here about benefiting anyone because, as we know, markets readily provide many things that are known to be bad for consumers. But the political dimension of the paradigm says we must remain neutral as to what consumers choose to consume. The economic dimension tells us that these choices should be made in free markets in which no one tell the consumer what they should prefer. Technological rationality tells us consumer preferences should be satisfied by the manipulation of nature in the production process, and this is to be done in the most efficient way. Recall that we take consumer preferences as we find them and cannot resort to second-order preferences in our analysis. That would suggest that consumers should prefer to have better preferences. Rather than choosing Marlboros, for example, the smoking consumer should choose not to smoke. But the dimensions of our paradigm tell us that preferences are sacrosanct. Thus a 'good' marketing outcome efficiently provides individual consumers with what they think they need as they express it in the market.

We can continue this scenario by expanding the economic dimension of the DSP. Each of our individual consumers has a consumer preference function that they bring with them into the marketplace where marketers compete to satisfy them. Those who satisfy them best and most consistently will live to market another day because they will make profits on the exchanges which reputedly satisfy both buyers and sellers. Recall that neither has any interest in benefiting society directly, but they seek to satisfy only their own immediate interests. In doing so, they inadvertently benefit society by producing economic growth (the wealth of nations) that then benefits all equally. Another chapter in the marketing text tells us that all consumers are different, atomistic individuals who can, with proper attention, be accumulated into similar groups called target markets whose

needs can be attended to more efficiently. This means we can sell more goods more efficiently thereby increasing sales and profits even more. Here again, we see efficiency at work and the marketing concept being played out. Satisfy consumer needs at a profit!

While marketers never ask who created the rules we are now governed by, we know the answer. It was initially John Locke, Adam Smith and Francis Bacon. From the standpoint of contemporary views of progress, they constitute the pantheon of virtue and the creators of the good life. From a sustainability perspective, they are not held in such high regard. Whether you seek to praise them or bury them, they lead us back to the major issue at hand. That issue is the ideological character of the DSP.

Because ideology is such a loose construct, I will define it specifically as it is used in this essay. There are three possible functions of ideology that are relevant here. The first is to present the specific interests of the dominant class as the general interest. That is, those who occupy a dominant position in society wish to remain dominant, and to do this it is best if all others believe this dominance is justified because it serves their own interest as well. Second, ideology masks contradictions between what people believe should be and how society really is, as the conflicts between interests inevitably arise. Thus, if the game is unfair to certain non-dominant groups, they are led to accept their inferior performance as a personal failing rather than an inevitable consequence of the rules. Sociologists refer to this phenomenon as 'blaming the victim', but economists refer to it as an inequality in initial endowments because it sounds better. The final function of ideology relates to the original propositions developed by the three precursors to modern marketing. Specifically, their ideas have been repeated and reinforced for more than 200 years now, and they still form the foundation within which Western societies function today. In this context, ideology equates the present with the past. What was true decades, or even centuries, ago, is still considered to be true today. What was right then, is right today despite that fact that actual material reality has been significantly transformed. This serves to maintain class dominance across time regardless of the changes that have taken place within society. Resource shortages were, for example, virtually unimaginable a century ago and economic growth universally acclaimed, but this is clearly an issue now as material circumstances have changed. In any or all of these functions of ideology, the idea is to maintain stability of institutional arrangements that are to the advantage of one class over others. This equates to the function of paradigms as well. A paradigm's dimensions are mutually consistent and mutually supporting. When attacked from the outside, the intellectual forces of the paradigm unite to fend off conflicts.

Paradigms are amenable to change from within, however. But change from within is not as nefarious as changes coming from beyond the limits. When conflicts arise within a paradigm, as they often do, they are considered anomalies that must be addressed to bring consistency back to the paradigm. The history of science demonstrates that such anomalies occur with some frequency and do not present a major intellectual challenge. In this case, differences might be considered policy issues or methods issues, but they are not paradigm-level issues. Paradigm issues only arise

when anomalies become frequent and persistent. When the intellectual forces of the paradigm cannot force the anomaly back into conformity, then a crisis of knowledge occurs because the constructs within the dominant paradigm cannot solve the problem, but the old constructs are incommensurable with the constructs that are the basis for a new paradigm that might solve the problem. This is when, and only when, paradigms shift. When confronted with incommensurability, the proponents of the old paradigm first refuse to acknowledge the crisis, then they demand that the crisis be resolved from within the existing paradigm, and finally, they acknowledge the superiority of the new paradigm. The superiority of the new paradigm must be acknowledged, in the end, because it solves the problems that the old paradigm could not solve and, in addition, solves the standard problems of the paradigm more parsimoniously or elegantly.

This process plays itself out very slowly in most cases because the proponents of the old paradigm demand that competitors make their claims in the idiom of the old paradigm. This works as a constraint on substantive change because, in most cases, demonstrating the superiority of the new in the framework of the old is virtually impossible, as the different frameworks represent different world views with different constructs and different evaluative criteria. As a result, there is no neutral ground from which to frame the argument. All conflicts initially take the form of a discourse between Tweedledee and Tweedledum with each making seemingly nonsensical claims to the other. Herein lies the intractable path to sustainable marketing. While the path taken here thus far may seem to be a digression, it was necessary for understanding why we have achieved so little despite the efforts of so many.

The profligacy of the West

Thus far, I have tried to demonstrate three points. First, sustainability is a problem to be dealt with either now or later, and thus far we have avoided dealing with it directly. Second, it will not be solved from within the framework of the existing paradigm as the necessary conditions for sustainability are incommensurable with the standard approach to marketing practice that still has its foundations resting on Enlightenment constructs. Finally, Western society will not change to a new sustainability paradigm until it is recognized that the old paradigm is in crisis. This requires explicit recognition that the root causes of the environmental crisis are a consequence of outmoded approaches to contemporary problems. Thus, trying to situate the solution to sustainability within the modern conception of markets and marketing will yield too little, too late. To add to our problems, globalization is exacerbating the situation, not eliminating it as contemporary economics and marketing would have us believe. We see this situation characterized in Lewis Carroll's prescient book, *Alice Through the Looking-Glass*. After racing at great speed, Alice stops to look around and observes, 'Why, we are just where we were when we started'. The Red Queen replies, 'Oh yes. You have to run twice as fast as that to get anywhere else'. This is the situation when one pursues economic

growth to solve the problems created by economic growth. No matter how fast you grow, you must grow even faster to keep ahead of the problems created by growth. This is, of course, the ideology of the cancer cell.

As we know from virtually every marketing text, the purpose of marketing is to increase sales and to do it as efficiently as possible. Marketing education has as its prime objective teaching future marketers how to capture the hearts, minds, and wallets of consumers. For consumers, the objective is to consume more and more, being mindful to recycle, while the then President, George Bush, in the US admonishes them to buy even more so the economic problem will go away. Apparently, the environmental problem is on hold until we solve the economic problem, for there appears to be little relationship between the two in the minds of policy makers. But one must ultimately ask, "To what purpose is all this growth and consumption?" Now, there is a problem! We are not supposed to ask that question because it is the central tenet in the DSP of Western industrial society, and, with no small amount of irony, the former socialist world as well. We may all ask, and are sometimes invited to ask, how to achieve more growth in a more efficient way. That is, we are invited to criticize and improve methods for achieving growth, but never to question the principle of growth itself. The former is within the paradigm, while the latter is against it. So now we must ask the question to which we may not like the answer. Remember the man on the branch?

Why are selling more (marketing practice) and consuming more (consumer behaviour) of such paramount importance that they have become the definition of progress in the Western world? Progress has become defined as material progress in the last century. We are all told repeatedly that 'the rising tide lifts all boats'. As the economy grows, we all share the benefits. Is this fact, or ideology expressing the specific interest of the dominant class as the general interest? If everyone does not gain equally, it is because some work harder or more effectively than others. Is this fact, or ideology masking the contradiction from the first argument. That is, some work very hard and never get ahead. Everyone's material well-being should be continuously improving. Is this fact, or ideology arguing that what used to be true (and still is in the Third World), is still true. In the early part of the twentieth century, peoples' well-being did need improvement, but does it need even more improvement in the twenty-first century? The World Values Survey has consistently demonstrated, for example, that Americans' sense of well-being has not substantially improved for 30 years despite significant increases in material wealth. As can be seen, it does not take much imagination to see the ideological in everyday existence. The DSP is ubiquitous and reinforces our beliefs at every turn, convincing us that material wealth is good and that more is better without end.

Marketing has become the unwitting vehicle through which this agenda is carried out. The process is given many names that have been recently published by critics of the marketing process as used in Western industrial societies. They carry such titles as *Affluenza*, *The Poverty of Affluence*, and *Is the American Dream Killing You?* and the message is quite clear. Why are we doing this to ourselves? It looks as though we are still trying to get the Darwin Award. The answer, in the context of marketing practice is quite simple, although we continue to walk around the

elephant in the living room. Marketers sell more and more because the economic structure of Western industrial societies demands it. Further, we do not globalize marketing as a strategy but as an imperative.

Both growth and globalization are imperatives of capitalism, the DSP of Western industrial societies (with a few minor exceptions). Firms in capitalism, by all accounts, must expand their operations or die. This is an almost self-evident proposition. In order to remain competitive, firms must expand to achieve economies of scale. Expansion requires growth in markets, and growth in markets requires marketing practices that achieve that growth: hence, the marketing concept. When markets become saturated and the marginal cost of growth exceeds the marginal benefits, markets must be found in other places (globalization) or in other forms by bringing social areas not previously subject to the market into the market. This is referred to as economic imperialism or the 'commodification of everything'. In the US for example, we now market education, healthcare and social insurance as consumer products.

When all things are relegated to the market, a new form of life is created in which atomistic individuals are freed of political and ethical constraints on behaviour and seek to satisfy their needs (and greeds) in the marketplace. This is the life of negative freedom in which the individual is freed from constraints traditionally imposed by society, church and government. Freedom becomes redefined as market freedom and political life becomes separated from and inferior to economic life. This de-politicization of society has potentially dire consequences if political institutions are allowed to atrophy because they are no longer necessary. The questions of who we want to be (ideal regarding principles) are reduced to what we want to have (want regarding principles) and all conflicts are adjudicated in the market. We will get what we want to have, but we have little concern for who we become. This is the essence of Erich Fromm's last book, *To Have Or To Be?* (1976) Questions of wealth distribution, for example, no longer exist. Who gets what is decided in the market and is not subject to the reflections of citizens. Every allocation of resources is fair so long as one person does not gain at the expense of another. If one person can be made better off without making anyone worse off, the exchange is efficient. This is referred to as Pareto Optimality, and it is the efficiency criterion of neoclassical economics. Its insidious character is that allocations can be perfectly efficient and, at the same time, be grotesquely unfair and environmentally destructive.

The problem that the Pareto criterion presents relative to sustainability is that the only condition under which it can function as intended (maintaining the maldistribution of wealth and power) is continuous economic growth. With growth, the wealthy can become more wealthy without anyone else being made poorer. And in absolute terms, the poorer elements of society may even get a bit more. Once growth stops, however, then the decision regarding who gets what becomes a political decision that is anathema to those who benefit most from the status quo. What Pareto Optimality justifies, and even promotes, is vast differentials between haves and have nots, or poverty in the midst of wealth. At the same time its logic is destructive of the environment because you cannot have infinite growth in a finite system. This is economic ideology at its very best

as it serves to convince the one pulling the plough that he is riding in a golden chariot. Marketing, as it is currently practised, supports this ideology and, because it is consistent with the DSP, moves us farther from sustainability rather than towards it. Every effort at green marketing, even with the best of intentions, plays into the myth of green marketing. That is, in its attempt to move us towards sustainability, it inadvertently provides an intellectual escape from the dystopian shadow of the DSP, reinforcing the belief that, if we consume more and recycle, the naturalness of the DSP will be vindicated.

Marketing and sustainability

What the forgoing suggests is that, as many critics have said before, capitalism contains multiple contradictions. Because marketing in the Western industrial world is played out within a predominantly capitalist framework, it supports, and when successful accelerates, these same contradictions. Only one of these contradictions is immediately relevant in the relationship between marketing and sustainability, and that is the conditions under which production for the market takes place.

This has two dimension, however. These are the biophysical limits to growth and the social limits to growth. Contemporary marketing practice has consistently disregarded these limits because they are contrary to the DSP that projects an image of limitlessness in all activities. Physics tells us that there are biophysical limits resulting from thermodynamic processes that we might express simply as: (1) nothing comes from nothing; and (2) everything goes somewhere. These are the familiar problems of sources and sinks in ecology. To consume, you must produce; to produce, you must use resources – both consuming and producing create waste. The cycle is inevitable but unacknowledged until very recently in history and is still not respected in marketing practice.

There are, in addition to biophysical limits to growth, social limits. While the pernicious effects of materialism are well documented, its relationship to sustainability is discussed less often. Marketing practice has as its fundamental goal, to increase levels of consumption through marketing activities. This is what every marketing text, including green marketing texts, teaches us to do. While it is true that most books have two paragraphs in which they present the societal marketing concept, it is never mentioned again and is certainly never enacted as a constraint on marketing activity. Marketing has a fundamental motivating principle derived directly from the DSP as presented earlier. That principle is that consuming is good and consuming more is better. Under the dimensions of the DSP, this philosophy makes perfect sense. Everyone makes their own choices (political), the market decides which of these choices to satisfy (economic), and advancing technology provides the means to satisfy those choices. And when the garbage gets too deep, technology will emerge to fix it (the 'where there's muck, there's money' mentality). When resources are short, technology will find new ones.

The difficulty here is that this mentality assumes that, what each of us can do individually, all can do collectively. This is infrequently the case in reality. The marketing process, when carried out under visions of limitlessness, encourages each individual to get what they want in the market. As each gets what they want, there is little visible consequence. However, the accumulation of small effects can result in very large effects unintended by any of the individuals. These are called social traps, and they tell us that what each individual may be able to do, all individuals collectively cannot do. The consequences of such social traps are ozone depletion, global warming, pollution, etc. Every individual's contribution is extremely small, but the sum of the effects is potentially disastrous to all. The social limits to growth relate directly back to the biophysical limits to growth, and both working together undermine the conditions of production. Thus, marketing as it is currently practiced will, in the long run undermine the ecological conditions that make it possible. While green marketing seeks to minimize the effect, so long as it operates within the DSP of Western societies, in the long run, it cannot succeed.

It is within this framework of thought that green marketing emerges as a myth. Myth does not suggest that green marketing does not exist. It does exist and it is growing. The myth suggested here is that green marketing is the solution to the paradigm problem and, that it can be incorporated into the paradigm as it exists. This means that the fundamental tenets of the paradigm can remain intact. It characterizes environmental problems, and through them sustainability, as anomalies, not as a crisis of knowledge. Green marketing acts a patch in the framework, suggesting that with only minor amendments, marketers can go about their business of selling more. This is not to discredit green marketing or its proponents. Green marketing is a necessary amendment to traditional marketing practice, but it is not a sufficient transformation. It is a tool in the sustainability tool chest, but it is not the blueprint for survival.

What is needed is not green reform that is framed in the idiom of the DSP (political and economic liberalism and technological optimism). Reformism, as a strategy for change, leaves the fundamental principles of the DSP in place and tries to effect change within the prevailing structure through policy initiatives. If that structure has the form and function of ideology, as was suggested earlier, then reformism will be ineffective in bringing substantive transformation to the marketing process. Rather, it is the underlying principles that must be changed, and then marketing will change to conform to new requirements. Marketing is promiscuous and can be done in many different ways to achieve many different purposes. Contemporary marketing practice takes the form it does because it exists within a set of institutions (the DSP) with which it is compatible. It has evolved within these institutions and is a reflection of their ideology. It is not marketing per se that is leading us away from sustainability but the institutions of the DSP that inform marketing practice. It is here that change must be effected. All the rest will follow. But, as stated earlier, paradigms are highly resilient and protect themselves when confronted with conflicting ideas. They shift only under conditions of crisis and herein lies the real problem. Without acknowledgement of crisis, changes are made only through reform within the paradigm. The unsustainable institutions underlying marketing practice remain intact. This is green marketing.

As mentioned earlier, many critics have called for a new paradigm conducive to sustainability. But we are no closer to that now than we were 30 years ago. This is because people do not intentionally transform paradigms. While it can be shown that paradigms have changed as a result of what one or a few people did, it was never their intention to effect such dramatic changes. It just happened. The power of the reasonable argument is rejected in paradigm conflict. Paradigms change people (and processes) after events leading to crises of knowledge occur. The question is, 'Is the DSP of Western society on the verge of a crisis of knowledge?'

The answer, from all outward appearances, is definitely maybe. Many environmental problems have come and gone because, while they were inconvenient, they were not imperilling life as we know it. We were able to put them out of sight and, thereby, out of mind. All Western countries have done this at one time or another. We were able to think of them as anomalies that could be reconciled within existing frameworks. When global warming enters the picture, however, things change. This phenomenon affects every living thing on the planet and can be escaped by no one. Why it is different is because if the full force of its effects materialize, the profligate lifestyles of the Western industrial societies will have to change. This means that political, economic and technological institutions that exist now will be transformed dramatically. Changes in individual freedom, accumulation of private property, procedural neutrality in government, free markets for allocating resources and technofixes, alongside a variety of other unknown changes, will occur when resource availability diminishes and the satisfaction of basic needs once again becomes problematic. Unfortunately, global warming is not yet recognized as a crisis within the DSP. We have not yet tried to effect or even formulate solutions. There is still hope that reformist measures will be sufficient to remediate the symptom. This suggests that the crisis of knowledge is not yet recognized. It will only be so when all the standard solutions in the arsenal of the DSP have failed. That time is not yet, but it may not be far off. When it comes, the new marketing concept will emerge.

The new marketing concept

One can only imagine what a new concept of marketing will entail, but we can speculate on what some of its features might be. To begin with, we must dismiss the idea that everyone's preferences must be satisfied, and this is particularly true on a global scale. The provisioning technology must provide for the needs of the global population first as suggested in the Brundtland Commission's definition. While we cannot say exactly what that is, we know it is not the level of material existence of Western industrial societies expanded to include the world's population. The new marketing concept will be based on what is enough rather than on how much you want. And more importantly, that enough-ness cannot continue to grow. This was argued more than a century and a half ago by John Stuart Mill, in *Principles of Political Economy*, who theorized about the economics of the steady state. This is a prerequisite to sustainability. In addition, marketing will adopt a

systems approach in which the effects of marketing practices will be evaluated by their consequences on both people and the global ecological systems of which they are a part. This will reflect both resource regenerative capacity and the earth's absorption capacity. Technologies must be based on energy flows and throughput assessments that allow humanity to live off nature's income rather than its capital. Successful marketing practice will be based on its contribution to well-being rather than profit. This also requires a redefinition of profit that is multi-dimensional and reflects the true triple bottom line.

Rather than promoting profligacy, sustainable marketing communications must promote a new relationship between humans and their consumption. This is the ethic of enough and the re-signification of the good life that is not based on possessions, but on relationships between humans and between humans and nature. The same tools (marketing is promiscuous!) can be used to foster commonality that were used to produce individuation for the past century. Sustainability, above all, tells us that we are all subject to the same environmental conditions both now and in the future, and that we are all responsible for the earth. Rather than promoting domination as advertising presently does, the ethic of stewardship can become the focal construct creating both a more sustainable life and a better life if the critics of materialism are correct. The options here are limited only by the imagination.

Distribution systems, from production to disposal, will be transformed in the new marketing concept. This is where efficiency remains important in marketing systems. A recent statistic is informative here. If one buys a new Mercedes, the car has more than two million miles on it if you count the distance that each of the parts has travelled in the process of production. I cannot say this is completely accurate, but it gets an important point across. Bio-regionalism is the basis for distribution in the new marketing concept. Whenever possible, all production will take place in the region in which the product will be consumed. Local production for local consumption is compatible with sustainability, but, as the new marketing concept suggests, one cannot have it all. As the London School of Economics' most famous student, Mick Jagger, once wrote, 'You can't always get what you want'. With a systems perspective, however, you can get most of what you need.

Limiting what you want becomes a function of price just as it is now. One of the problems of sustainability is that markets, for a variety of reasons (recall the infamous wager), do not get the prices right. This is because nature's storehouse has been consistently treated as a free good. In the new marketing, the full cost, including the environmental cost, will be in the price of goods. This might be effected in a number of ways through a combination of command and control procedures and market mechanisms. Specifically, carbon taxes can be added to the price of goods based on the 'carbon footprint' of the product. The proceeds of the tax can be used in a number of ways, among which is a refund to consumers who have low carbon footprints in their market choices. Sustainable choices will be subsidized by those who remain profligate in their consumption. This, as only one example, is actually quite easy to effect.

From a product perspective, the range of products will diminish dramatically but need not be reduced to very few with no variation. Planned obsolescence is completely out of the picture and durability is in it. One of the functions of

sustainable advertising would be to promote this idea to subvert the DSP's focus on individuation and private property. Products without ownership designed to be shared by multiple consumers represents a novel approach to marketing. This has been done with bicycles in Copenhagen, for example.

These are but a few examples of how sustainable marketing might be different from standard marketing. What is important, however, is that each of these examples contradicts one or more of the tenets of the DSP of Western industrial societies. This is why the transformation in the DSP is necessary and why sustainable marketing is in the future. There are many institutional constraints that inhibit the development of sustainable marketing practices once you get beyond improved technologies to reduce the impact of consumption as it now exists. As suggested earlier, the force of the better argument is of limited use here once one challenges the basic premises of the DSP. Until global warming, or some unknown future problem, assumes a 'crisis of knowledge' status, changes such as those above, as simple as they may be, will not materialize in any substantial way.

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