

## Reality Fantasy

This blog shows the value of stepping back and questioning whether the prevailing view of how our society and economy is running is sustainable in the long-run. If not, what should we do about it and does this mean adopting an 'alternative reality' to ensure our survival, rather than tinkering with the present one?

## Let's Get Physical and Metaphysical

We are all physical beings, which in itself restricts our perceptual range within quite narrow boundaries of 5 senses (some would say 6 if you count extra-sensory perception) as we try to make sense of ourselves and the universe. I've heard it said that this is like living in a post (mail) box which has 5 slots through which we receive sensory information. This in itself is limited by the scope of our nervous systems to pick up and decipher sound and light information through certain frequency bands and biological touch, taste and smell. All this is relayed to the brain to make sense of in order for us to survive and reproduce. Other living things have a different perception of the world due to detecting different stimuli e.g. electro-magnetism in the case of some birds and insects for navigation or heightened versions of some or all of the 5 senses we experience such as a dog's sense of smell, or a bee's capacity to see ultra-violet light. We can add to this 'reality' the panoply of human feelings and emotions which even Stephen Dawkins acknowledges are legitimate:

Rocks don't feel jealousy and mountains do not love. These emotions are intensely real to those who experience them, but they didn't exist before brains did (Dawkins, 2012, p.18)

Isn't it wasteful then, that we restrict our perceptions, experiences and culture by believing in a certain narrative which appears to be hastening our demise and that of every other living thing? Reich (1970, p.160) says that:

A world that is artificial is also one that is lifeless and a society that sets out to manufacture an artificial world ends as a manufacturer of death.

Reich coined the term 'Disneyfication' to encapsulate this further and it can be applied in our time to the trend towards 'virtual realities' created by technology.

Shonin et al (2005), put it even more bluntly, when they describe people 'living as a walking corpse'. What we as educators need to consider at an existential level is: are we contributing to the mindlessness and Disneyfication of society through a narrow world view channelled via our professional approach to teaching and learning, or are we suitably enlightened and able to foster this enlightenment in our educational institutions? Another way of putting this is to ask: 'to what extent are educators part of the problem, or part of the solution?' If this is simplistic, perhaps it would be better to come back to the question: 'are we doing enough to enable students to question critically all narratives and to have the ability to develop others which maximise personal potential and also be of benefit to others now and in the indefinite future?'

Neoliberalism helps us to buy into a reality which hampers the pursuit of sustainability as outlined in my book. It's essentially a short-termist mentality, even though the liberal rhetoric might seem otherwise. It continues to be the 'opiate of the masses' by being the vehicle for consumerism which can distract and console. Once you start to see this as an 'Emperor's

New Clothes' narrative, you can't help seeing it as utter folly, no less folly than believing that the world is flat- yes the Flat Earthers are alive and well and in their many thousands, just Google 'Flat Earth'. Let's explore 'Flat Earthism' a bit further, because it provides insight into the Neoliberal narrative and how it hoodwinks us into thinking that this is unescapable 'Reality'.



By creating a group believing in a Flat Earth, a false consensus starts to operate i.e. although in a tiny minority, it appears that the belief is more mainstream. Another effect might be that the believers develop a 'bunker mentality', whereby they feel unfairly criticised or even persecuted by mainstream thought, which consolidates their beliefs rather than sowing the seeds of doubt. This is also evident in groups (sometimes labelled 'Cults' or 'New Religious Movements'), who adhere to the teachings of a charismatic leader. Navarro (2012, online) says that all these leaders are:

pathologically narcissistic. They all have or had an over-abundant belief that they were special, that they and they alone had the answers to problems, and that they had to be revered. They demanded perfect loyalty from followers, they overvalued themselves and devalued those around them, they were intolerant of criticism, and above all they did not like being questioned or challenged. And yet, in spite of these less than charming traits, they had no trouble attracting those who were willing to overlook these features.

Leon Festinger (1956) and his team documented such a leader known as Mrs Keech in his famous study called *When Prophecy Fails*. She was convinced that aliens had given her warnings about an impending flood disaster and she built up a loyal following who transformed their lives in preparation for it (needless to say it didn't happen!). Festinger's account was set in the historical context of many other 'Faith' based groups, mostly religious and he drew out common features of all; some similar to Navarro. Other cults have occurred since, often with tragic outcomes e.g. Jim Jones' 'People's Temple' cult in 1977 which ended up with over 900 people being convinced to commit suicide together. Could it be that we too are putting our faith into a type of Neoliberal cult? Not led by a specific person, but by a system which is moulding us all into pathologically narcissistic individuals, who believe in the narrative that easily measurable material progress is the main legitimate and meaningful outcome of our lives?

Comparing the narrative of the Flat Earthers with Neoliberalism... isn't that going too far? I don't think so, because both believe in falsehoods. The former denies that the Earth is a globe and the latter thinks that globalisation, the market economy and growth (sometimes labelled 'sustainable growth'), are the only instruments for humans to progress and thrive. Both selectively ignore the well-established laws of nature and physical boundaries and both use

confirmation bias to bolster their arguments. It's ironic that the Flat Earthers, especially in the USA, also affiliate with the Creationists, Climate Change deniers and vaccination phobics, which can be viewed as a reaction against Neoliberalism because these are often the people who feel left behind by the prevailing system. It's no coincidence that they have Republican sympathies and tend to support Donald Trump (is this also Cult mentality?).

Although there's been a strong sustainability narrative out there for many decades (if not millennia if you examine indigenous cultures), in the 'Modern World', this is still not in a coherent form to challenge and replace the prevailing dominant narrative. There is some awareness of impending environmental disaster, but many dots of knowledge and true acknowledgement are still to be joined. Some people who have the luxury of time and lifestyle think about things and deal positively with isolated issues, such as the problem of plastic pollution, but we've not yet got to the stage where most people would be happy to totally change their way of living and working in order to properly protect the biosphere. This is where strong cross-disciplinary thinking comes in and is summed up well by Bennet & Teske (2017). I quote them at length because I can't better their summary which is based upon the work of Nelson (2013) and Maxwell (2007; 2008).

for the first time in our species' history, we must become sufficiently aware of ourselves and our planet to consciously guide our own evolution, becoming "architects and intentional co-creators of new ways of seeing, thinking and living—ways that truly fit the unique conditions that are emerging in the twenty-first century. [This has] strong resonances with philosopher of science Nicholas Maxwell's repeated calls for a transition from knowledge-inquiry to wisdom-enquiry. Maxwell contends that many of the global problems we are now facing have arisen because of our pursuit (particularly academic) of knowledge and technological skill has given us unprecedented powers to act without giving us the concomitant understanding and capacity to act wisely: the "crisis of science without wisdom" as he designates it. He argues for the pursuit and promotion of global wisdom and a revolution in our institutions of learning such that the basic intellectual aim becomes the acquisition not of knowledge, but of wisdom- something which he defines as "the capacity to realise what is of value in life for oneself and others, thus including knowledge and technological know-how, but much else besides" (Bennet & Teske, 2017, p. 767).

This is where leadership for sustainability in education and other walks of life can make a difference, because without it the Neoliberal market economy will change too slowly to make a significant difference for future generations, if in fact those future generations survive. This is more of a change of thinking (or ways of thinking- a subtle difference) to help deliver the wisdom that we need for long-term survival with suitable quality of life.

### **Anarchy Rules?**

Perhaps the Anarchists have got it right. They are the true sceptics of grand narratives and intrusive power on individual freedom. They get a bad press, as they are often perceived to stand for chaos and destruction- think when you might use the word anarchy! However, I came across a useful way of viewing this as described by a self-confessed anarchist on a radio

programme. Having been a bit vague about what anarchism was all about, she was asked what the anarchist version of ‘Keep Off The Grass’ was. She replied that it might be ‘Seeded Area’, implying that if you kept off the grass it would be improved through new growth. It would then be up to the individual to decide whether they should do this. If said individual had a belief system which valued green areas for their recreation and the recreation of others, then they would indeed keep off the grass without the need for authoritarian enforcement. This is a version of the same strategy I use with my seven-year old. She is far more likely to conform to my wishes if I give the reasons why I want her to do something. It’s not really an anarchistic approach, because in effect I’m manipulating her actions for my own ends. Nevertheless, it’s showing her respect and also a benevolence which I hope she will display to others having absorbed it into her moral schema. However, a common thread in my book is my concern that as our ecological knowledge and ability to think deeply, critically and sceptically are sadly lacking. We often seem incapable of making links between our local individual actions and those of the groups to which we belong and the damage our collective lifestyles are causing to the planet.

The anarchy example above can be linked to a higher order ethical perspective as outlined by Baxter (2013, p.65) below. If everyone had the individual ethics to do their utter best to minimise or rectify damage to the biosphere, then collectively we could move much faster into a new paradigm. This would have to include radical changes of lifestyle that the present system is ill-suited to accommodate. This shows that an anarchistic perspective could actually be more planet friendly than a Neoliberal perspective which tends to occupy the middle two categories of this model.

<p><b>“Ethics” (Principled conscience)</b></p>	<p>This is where the person actually develops the ethical principles by which they live. They are predicated by the higher “rules” of society but lived by as a “code of honour”. The person does not need the validation or the censure of society or religion to do right. The person lives by these very high-level principles consistently and constantly.</p>
<p><b>“Principles behind the Rules” (Postconventional)</b></p>	<p>Where the learner understands which rules (the ethical ones) must be kept – and they are kept because it is the right thing to do) but other minor rules may be broken according to the circumstances. These broken rules are not broken because of selfishness but because of a higher principle.</p>
<p><b>“Absolute Rules” (Conventional)</b></p>	<p>Where the rules of the society are obeyed because of a fear of punishment or later, a hope of reward. At this stage, people may feel that if they are not caught, they are not guilty. The rules are obeyed for show (for others).</p>
<p><b>“No Rules” (Preconventional)</b></p>	<p>Where the learner does not take into account the social rules of the society (egocentric).</p>

### **Green Government?**

It seems ironic that the Blair government of the early 2000s, having continued the sort of Neoliberalism established by Thatcher, was also at the forefront of promoting sustainability in schools. They had the aim of ‘making every school a Sustainable School by the year 2020’. This involved endorsement from Ofsted, sustainability being built into the National

Curriculum and promoted by the National College for School Leadership (NCSL) which developed a comprehensive toolkit (which I contributed to), to help senior leaders implement a sustainability ethos (NCSL, 2008). Research in partnership with WWF-UK was sponsored, which showed the full value of being a sustainable school, including aspects of leadership improvement, curriculum enrichment, pedagogic enhancement and pupil and staff well-being. Much of this work is still very relevant and useful today. Unfortunately, it was unceremoniously jettisoned by the Coalition Government of the Conservatives and Liberals in 2010. If it had continued as a national imperative, I think the ‘bottom up’ changes would’ve had a stronger momentum and the government’s other policies which were still Neoliberal and unsustainable, would’ve been called into question more successfully. This quote from Tony Blair is prophetic for all the wrong reasons, as it didn’t make the link between the Neoliberal philosophy of his government and its education for sustainability initiative.

Make the wrong choices now and future generations will live with a changed climate, depleted resources and without the green space and biodiversity that contribute both to our standard of living and our quality of life. Each of us needs to make the right choices to secure a future that is fairer, where we can all live within our environmental limits. That means sustainable development (Tony Blair, 2005, p.4).

Notice the point made that ‘Each of us needs to make the right choices’. You can see this as an example of outsourcing responsibility to the individual, with the implication that if enough individuals choose a sustainable lifestyle, then the market (not the government) will sort it out. This is ok in theory, but doesn’t take into account the vested interests that will drag out the process. An environmental audit by Carrington (2012) said that the following government (Conservative/Liberal coalition headed by Prime Minister David Cameron from 2010-15) fared no better, despite saying he would lead the ‘Greenest Government Ever’ (Cameron, D., 2010).

### **Efficiency Ethic**

Despite the warm words, the governments of Blair and Cameron continued policies emanating from the Thatcher era which encouraged ‘Turbo Capitalism’ as described by Luttwak (1999). His was one of the earliest critiques of Neoliberalism before it was seriously doubted by more mainstream economists, who themselves were catching up with the environmentalists who had flagged up the hazards for decades. Like Bregman (2017), he highlighted that capitalism with light-touch governance of industry and commerce runs away with itself and as part of its modus operandi is hell-bent on driving out ‘inefficiencies’. When it does that, invariably it drives out aspects of ‘quality of life’ because often the inefficiencies are bound up with this i.e. things that aren’t ‘objectively’ measured or are seen as dragging down productivity. So, if I have a chat with a colleague by the water-cooler, I may be feeling happier at work by consolidating a relationship, but I’m being inefficient in terms of my tangible output. This overlooks the fact that by being more collegiate may assist tangible outputs further down the line, because my colleague may be more collaborative with me on a project because we have a positive relationship. Inefficiencies would also include all unpaid activities and stopping to admire a view.

The 'Turbo' element is the aforementioned speed of technological change, which is chewing up the Earth's natural resources and spitting them out as stuff and waste (the human production of stuff now weighs more than all the biological matter). It's also the reason why social and psychological change is failing to keep up, causing well-being to plummet. This is illustrated by Bloodworth (2018) in a book which documents his experiences of taking 'Gig Economy' and Unskilled jobs. He concludes that it isn't just that these jobs are low-paid, insecure and boring, they also erode an individual's self-respect and spirit. He gives an example of a town where coal-mining had disappeared. The miners had great kudos from being miners and would be proud to declare that to anyone. The replacement industry was a vast distribution warehouse. When people there are asked what they do, they invariably say 'I only work at Amazon', thus sounding apologetic and ashamed about it. From what Bloodworth describes, the work in the warehouse is robotic and unrelenting and even less satisfying than hacking coal out of the ground all day. As well as the mining industry disappearing, the social side of it has also largely disappeared in terms of associated sports teams and working men's clubs (albeit such clubs were sometimes hot-beds of sexist, homophobic and racist attitudes).

### **The Pitts**

When I worked in Nottinghamshire, mining had largely disappeared and there was a continuing nostalgia for the community cohesion that had been lost. We're talking about DH Lawrence country here where 'Men were Men' and boys aspired to follow their fathers and uncles down the mines. Another downside to this, was that education wasn't really valued and a macho-culture prevailed which could subjugate females and these attitudes persisted in the local culture long after the mines had closed. This was in contrast to where my mother was brought up in the mining area of the Rhondda Valley in south Wales. The culture there actively encouraged children to 'do well at school' in order to escape the clutches of manual labour. Perhaps it had something to do with the Chapel culture and other 'non-conformist' traditions, exemplified in 17<sup>th</sup> Century Levellers (early examples of socialists), 19<sup>th</sup> Century Chartism (lobbied for universal male suffrage), or even the nature of the people who originally moved there from the countryside to improve their economic prospects.

In this context, it makes me doubt that education should promote the narrative of 'work hard at school and you'll get a good job and money to spend on a car, house, family and holidays abroad and avoid having to dig up the roads for a living'. This is merely propping up the Business As Usual, Turbo Capitalist system. Nor should it consign a large part of the population to the Gig economy because they have deemed to have 'failed' to be sufficiently academic and thus be labour-fodder for the self-same Turbo Capitalist system. Education for Sustainability would be looking to have the best of both worlds, where people can find happiness above and beyond material comfort, whilst not subjugating others or the biosphere. This is where having the 'global wisdom' comes in.

### **The Wisdom Narrative**

So far then I've described how we come up against the harsh 'realities' of our Neoliberal world and how we are ill-equipped to deal with it, let alone change it. Perhaps Biesta (2017) points to a way forward. I have adapted his arguments about the role of the educator to suit my own in terms of how the dominant narrative can be changed from the individual up.

Biesta uses the philosophy of Arendt and Levinas to describe a process whereby educators 'assist' learners and I paraphrase it here. He says that everyone is born on the planet as an individual and therefore brings a 'new beginning' to the world. As we develop throughout life, we continue to bring 'new beginnings' and inevitably these are influenced by others and we need interaction with others in order for these beginnings to be realised. Put another way, everyone has to work out and utilise their uniqueness, but these processes don't take place in a vacuum as we are social animals. A talented artist for example, may need some form of tutorage and possibly a mentor, to help them realise their ambitions and also help with setting up a studio space. They might also be part of a stimulating artistic community which bounces ideas between its members. Biesta says, this involves having an intimate 'sense of self', including a sense of personal responsibility. Educators therefore, need to help each unique person to exist in the world in a 'grown-up' way and this means in effect individuals 'allowing the world to exist'. Although this sounds very ego-centric, at a practical level it means that individuals need to know the limits of physical existence for fear of destroying it and therefore, him or herself. It also means that individuals need to identify how to keep themselves personally healthy and happy and how they can help others to be the same (and how these things aren't mutually exclusive). This is where the development of ecological knowledge and thinking comes in ('Eco-literacy'), which encourages linking to make better sense of the world and to operate in harmony with it.

Biesta puts world destruction and self-destruction at opposite ends of a spectrum, with individuals existing in the intervening 'middle ground' where self-expression encounters limits, interruptions and responses. These experiences show us that:

what I *do* matters...where I *am* matters, and where I *matter*...To stay in the middle ground this requires a desire for worldly existence, an existence outside ourselves- ek-sistence. And the educational task...is to arouse such a desire in another human being. (Biesta, 2017, p.15).

This links to the 'I, We, Planet' philosophy described in my book in relation to developing Leaders for Sustainability.

Biesta goes onto say that the state of 'Grown-upness' is always at stake and always in question. I think that this closely corresponds to how we contribute to sustainability through our own Butterfly Effects. This is because it recognises the effects and significance of individual actions (Everyone Counts). Our technological prowess has mightily outstripped our psychological and social ability to cope with the consequences of it. Our species can be described as, at best juvenile (perhaps infantile would be a more apt analogy) in our development, hence the continued wanton often oblivious destruction of the planet's life-giving resources. Any parent has witnessed their toddler scribble on a wall or smash a sacred family object, with no malice aforethought or realisation of the effect on surrounding adults (this can't be said for adolescents and can be a symptom of social and emotional difficulties). This fits with Biesta's statement that:

by understanding the infantile and the grown-up, the egological and the non-egological as two different ways...both options are open for children *and* for adults- and perhaps we should say that we can only ever know retrospectively whether we have turned out in a particular situation as child-like or adult-like.

Our age and the size of our body are no secure indicators for that (Biesta, 2017, p.16).

To facilitate all this, the child and educator need to operate in the middle ground, where the former is given the opportunity by the latter to explore the distinction between ‘desires and desirability’. The grown-upness of this is having the ability to do it. This embraces the ability to think critically and act ethically by being exposed to the real world in the context of a carefully crafted curriculum. The educator would also need to provide, in Biesta’s terms ‘sustenance’ for the learner in the form of a stimulating learning environment which would include physical and emotional support. By encouraging the active participation of the learner in the, sometimes difficult, middle ground of existence and mediating this ground through the curriculum and skilled pedagogy, the learner can assimilate skills and concepts for lifelong learning. Some of these will suit the status quo of easily tested outcomes for short-term expediency, but more importantly, they will contribute to individual development that will be less likely to cause damage to themselves, others or the planetary eco-system. This calls for the educator to be in a similar position and for this to happen, they need to be grown-up advocates for the planet, with the accompanying system of sustainability values.

For many educators this would need a change of professional culture more akin to pre-Neoliberal times. However, the watch words here are ‘skilled pedagogy’ and not a return to some of the ‘wishy washy’ progressive education which foundered on unskilled pedagogy. I was always amazed at how many teachers were poor learners in the sense that they lacked curiosity and were reluctant to try new ideas in case of failure, or sadly they were the products of the limited education system themselves. Where schools are ‘Learning Institutions’ and not merely ‘Institutions of Learning’ their educators are highly skilled pedagogues and not simply deliverers of a preordained curriculum in a preordained manner. I’ll return to these learning concepts in my book because they have many implications for leadership.

This is where the bottom-up approach has the potential to make a real difference to the understanding of sustainability and resulting actions at an individual and societal levels. To eat the metaphorical Neoliberal Elephant, alongside learners and colleagues we need to co-construct a radical new narrative which gives people the appropriate cutlery, appetite and robust mastication to do so. Part of this entails pointing out its failings, but mainly entails envisaging and then creating a ‘better’ overall way of life (a better narrative) for everyone and allowing each person to be part of the solution, with educators as the facilitators for new ways of thinking and acting.

### **Benevolent Individualism**

Reich (1970, p.190-1) had a similar outlook to Biesta in that he advocated a more authentic concept of individualism that wasn’t linked to an overarching external belief system:

self does not mean to be selfish. It means to start from premises based on human life and the rest of nature, rather than premises that are artificial products of the Corporate State, such as power or status. It is not an ego trip but a radical subjectivity designed to find genuine values in a world whose official values are false and distorted. It is not egocentricity, but honesty, wholeness, genuineness in all things. It starts from self because human life is

found as individual units, not as corporations and institutions; its intent is to start from life.

Implicit in this is the need for each individual to have a deep scepticism of the status quo and of 'conventional' ways of thinking, which tend to be linear with narrow points of reference used for mechanistic analysis (befitting post-enlightenment thinking featured in another of my blogs). These have their place, but not to the exclusion of other perceptions, expressions or modes of thought. Reich's take on individualism is also at odds with the likes of philosopher John Gray, in that he believes in the innate goodness and generosity of spirit found in humans, rather than bestial selfishness. This turns their ideas upside down because Reich sees individuals as victims of 'The System', rather than perpetrators of it for selfish gain. All this has implications for educators, because if we see ourselves as 'taming the savage beasts' i.e. children (and I've worked with people who do), rather than nurturing the finer qualities of humanity, then we'll approach our work quite differently. To my mind children/students shouldn't be seen as horses to be broken so that we can maximise their utility. 'Spare the rod and spoil the child' needs to stay anachronistic.

It's significant that Reich and Biesta write about people today being trapped in an adolescent state, not able to take personal responsibility for much of their lives. In Reich's case he thinks that capitalism encourages this state because it's more receptive to superficial consumerism and for avoiding responsibility for the greater good. This is where a 'false consciousness' is created which dissipates individual and collective wisdom.

Plotkin (2008, p.176) also thinks that many in contemporary society remain in an adolescent egocentric stage, which stifles their development in skills for exercising discernment 'because every next person seems to be offering one form or another of the "answer" or the "secret"'. This means that people never really find self-understanding let alone a critical understanding of their society, leaving themselves more prone to the lures of advertising and other 'false' narratives. This also means that there is much out-sourcing of blame and/or shrugging of shoulders in the face of social inequality and environmental degradation. This links to the Freire's (1996) concept of a 'Magic Consciousness' and Reich's 'Disneyfication'.

### **False gods and virtual reality**

Our current dominant narrative is serving up a perfect storm of unsustainability in the form of Ecocide. This narrative emerged from the rationalism of the Enlightenment, with the latest iteration being Neoliberalism, which continues to fuel the Economic Growth agenda.

It seems incredible to me that there isn't more joined up thinking on all this, particularly from the academic community. This is caused by a combination of subject silos, lack of linked knowledge and vested interests who prefer the Neoliberal status quo and hope it will deliver sustainability through market forces with light-touch government. It's also been exacerbated by the social psychology of our species, which often eschews wisdom for gut-reactions and short-term comforts.

There are many examples of joined up approaches to this in the UK such as The New Economics Foundation, Cambridge University Institute for Sustainable Leadership, Schumacher College and some left of centre think-tanks. Most universities have sustainability faculties and student organisations such as 'People and Planet', which highlight and reflect a growing awareness of sustainability issues. All these organisations challenge the current

narrative and suggest alternatives. However, they are still in a tiny minority when compared to Higher Education faculties such as Economics and those dealing with 'Hi-Tec' science, which continue to be wedded to Growth narratives, including sometimes spurious Green Growth.

It's argued that biotech research and the development of 'Green' energy production technology are the routes to our salvation. There is also the prospect of 'Geo-engineering', whereby for example, solutions to global heating may come in the form of gigantic mirrors in space to reflect solar radiation, or seeding the oceans with iron filings to sequester carbon from the atmosphere. But wouldn't it be better to tackle the problems by allowing the biosphere to recover? At least we know this works. Who knows what other problems will be triggered by yet more Human-made dabblings? Also, the natural world provides us with the spiritual and aesthetic experiences which are integral to quality of life. Who really wants to merely 'survive' on a planet devoid of flora and fauna diversity, which could only be replaced by a sort of virtual reality provided by computers? Perhaps 'Shifting Baseline' syndrome described in my book will address this, so that if we have no memory of how things were, we won't miss them.

The Growth agenda also continues to be challenged by well-known Green groups such as Greenpeace and more recently Extinction Rebellion, whose activism is starting to hit the headlines (although the coverage of this by many media outlets is one of outrage at the inconvenience of them blocking roads, rather than the cause they're espousing). Meanwhile mainstream education ploughs on with a curriculum which largely does more to support the unsustainable status quo, than encouraging young people to question it and co-create sustainable alternatives. A spokesman for the Cambridge Centre for Existential Risk said in a radio programme that there was more expenditure on research to alleviate Male Baldness in the UK than on Existential Threats. Says it all really!

In his book 'Crack Capitalism', Holloway (2010) advocates using death by a thousand cuts, whereby people avoid large corporates and their overbearing technologies and consumer propaganda, in favour of local businesses, thus compromising the corporate strength which keeps us in its thrall. This might include people using cash for payments (including local currencies), rather than the ubiquitous 'contactless' cards. These in themselves incur charges for the retailer which are of benefit to big banks. The diminishing number of cash-points means that cash is becoming irrelevant for transactions, therefore further bolstering bank profits and enabling our consumer record to be tracked by the infamous algorithms discussed above. If this sort of local purchasing was more widespread, then it could augment other types of localism which contribute to a circular economy. By degrees, this would undermine the dominant Growth Narrative and the worst aspects of global Neoliberalism.

### **Not all Bad!**

You may think that it's too easy to criticise the present dominant narrative in the same vein as asking the Monty Python 'Life of Brian' obtuse question: 'what did the Romans ever do for us?' Apart from domination, laced with cruelty and servitude, the Romans gave the UK and the rest of their empire impressive architecture, cultural richness, innovative technology, road systems, advanced agriculture, sanitation, towns, law and order and relative peace for hundreds of years (one could say sustainability in the round). Similarly, our modern Western society predicated on economic growth, has provided physical comfort and longevity, plus

access to sophisticated technology, diverse foods and cultures and travel for millions of people, undreamt of by previous generations (putting aside relative inequality). So, what's not to like, given that we might have the capability of rectifying environmental and social problems through the application of democracy, technology and the Invisible Hand of the Market? This blog and the book as a whole has outlined the main thing 'not to like' i.e. the dehumanisation of humans in the cognitive as well as spiritual sense, as the pace of technological progress usurps our capacity to understand it, let alone deal with it. It has also talked of lack of wisdom in using our great knowledge to enhance, rather than sacrifice our capacity to be happy and lead fulfilling lives.

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