

Foreword by John Fullerton

The invitation to write the foreword to such a thoughtful inquiry into the state of our culture and the broader society is a genuine honor. It is also a responsibility I take quite seriously at this pivotal moment in our history as a nation, and even in the ongoing history of the human project.

Kevin Howard distinguished himself as one of the regular “front row” curious and thoughtful learners in my online course on Regenerative Economics. He regularly gave more insight and wisdom to our learning community than he probably received, and always with a smile. It’s no surprise to discover the depth of his perceptive and probing inquiry into truth that you hold in your hands, nicely curated into bite sized tastings. But unlike chocolate, you can safely freely gorge as you will want to do!

I’d like to begin with another social critic who I discovered early in my own search, John Ralston Saul. In *Voltaire’s Bastards* (1992), Saul presciently writes, “Our society contains no method of serious self-criticism for the simple reason that it is now a self-justifying system which generates its own logic.”

A society, or any institution for that matter, incapable of serious self-reflection and yes, as appropriate, self-criticism is a sitting duck. It can carry on for a while, sometimes a long while oblivious to the contradictions of its own being. But such contradictions most certainly exist in all human institutions.

And institutions exist in a complex evolving context that is always in flux. As the ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus rightly observed, “the only constant in life is change.”

One thing one learns from the study of living systems science, is that organisms that continue on and survive, much less thrive, must be adaptive and responsive to change. The rigid and the brittle, they break or die when the pressure rises enough. If this is the science of how life works, and it is, then Saul’s observation about our society is not only wise, it is also deadly serious.

Just what is the “self-justifying system which generates its own logic” you might wonder? I have my answer and the short version for your consideration goes something like this.

More than we may be conscious of, we at least in the West primarily attend the Church of Economics and bow down to the God of money. It governs our individual and collective decision making, displacing earlier cultural norms and ethics. The “economy” is all around us; it has become the water we swim in. Yet its workings seem both abstract beyond our grasp, and certainly out of our control. Life for too many has become about getting money...to live. We fail to even notice the contradictions. How can there be hundreds of billions for foreign military bases and missiles for our allies yet not the miniscule millions to feed our children nutritious food upon which their futures (and our future healthcare costs) depend? How can there be trillions to bail-out Wall Street and rescue the economy from a pandemic, yet no money to pay healthcare workers and teachers in the richest country in the history of the human race a living wage? How is it we fail to summon the political will to stop emitting more CO2 emissions into our

finite atmosphere year after year, knowing what we know? Because we care more about a corporation named Exxon or Aramco, or perhaps more about our entitled convenience than life itself?

The answers to these questions are of course complicated. But the system does generate a logic, the logic of economics and finance, the logic that success equals money and money equals power, the logic of winners and losers, the logic that winners know best, the logic that history gets to be told by the winners, the logic that our analytical minds are superior to our creative and intuitive minds, and therefore that STEM education is the logical path to a good job so one can afford to live. Which means the “winners” are bankers and accountants, and techies and engineers, not artists, poets, philosophers and social critics who dare to question the logic of the system, or more dangerous, who intend to transform the system. This in turn diminishes the voices of those we need to hear if our society is to do what societies that want to continue must do – adapt, and respond to the ever-changing context through honest and reflective self-criticism. Worse still, such internal logic stifles what Einstein himself considered more important than knowledge: our imagination.

I am now convinced that this logic is flawed. Fatally flawed. It has been accelerating for centuries, the shadow of the Enlightenment that delivered so much progress. But now the big test has arrived. It is not hyperbole to suggest that this is humanity’s first species test. Our performance on this test will impact not only our entire species, but all life on this our only home we call Earth. Sorry Elon Musk, the pursuit of life on Mars rather than genuine gratitude and the responsibility

that goes with it is ignorant and immoral folly.

The test has been coined the polycrisis. It is the interconnected and interdependent social, political, economic, financial, and the full breadth of ecological crises which are now collectively cascading out of control with dangerous feedback loops we don't fully understand.

Some refer to it as a Meta crisis with a common root cause. Many suggest that root cause is the myth of separation, the false idea that we are separate from one another in our individualism, that we are separate from "nature" rather than apart of nature. I happen to agree with this analysis. And here's the catch. The reductionist, mechanistic, and competitive mindsets that have enabled the so-called winners to be winners, the same reductionist, Newtonian mindset that derived the economic theories and finance practices that constitute the scripture at the Church of Economics are actually in conflict with our latest scientific understanding of how life works! But that's a story for another day.

What can be done? At the top of my list is to encourage, to honor, and to listen carefully to our social and cultural critics. The artists, the poets, and the essayists who dare to question the logic of our "self-justifying system" often at great personal cost. You hold in your hands a collection of just such vital cultural criticism, not all of which you will agree with or find comfortable to read. It is a book of important reflections, though some will be considered heresy in the Church of Economics. They aim to awaken our sensibilities from the egocentric slumber of convenience, and the egocentric mindless and endless pursuit of money and power too many have defined their life by for too long. It's an invitation to dialogue,

to question, an invitation to live one's unique essence not merely to cope, an invitation to reconnect with, and to fully participate in the miracle of life that surrounds us. And (at last if I may), it's an invitation to skip church.

Onward, At Last indeed!