

Edited by
Patrick U. Petit

Earth Capitalism

**Creating a New Civilization
through a Responsible Market Economy**



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*Companies are meant to serve society, not the other way around;
and companies that do not – and are not seen to – serve society will fail*

Stephan Schmidheiny
Businessman and Philanthropist

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**WHAT WILL HAPPEN IN CAPITALIST SOCIETIES
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– A DIALOGUE ON THE FUTURE OF MODERN CIVILIZATION –**

Hiroshi Tasaka

Human Society is Developing Dialectically

**What will happen in capitalist societies in the future?*

This question is an extremely important one today at a moment when global capitalism is being confronted by some extremely serious obstacles. But because the question is historical in its dimensions, simply relying on a “technology to predict the future” will not provide the answers. What we need, instead, is to understand a “philosophy to foresee the future.” In other words, we need to understand a philosophy that talks about the laws that underlie change, development, and evolution in our world.

**What kind of philosophy is the philosophy to foresee the future?*

Dialectic. In Western philosophy, dialectic began in Greece with Socrates and was systematized by Georg Hegel, the German Idealist philosopher. Also, Karl Marx used this philosophy in his theory of social change and Jean-Paul Sartre discussed its tenets in the context of Existentialism. In Eastern philosophy as well, dialectic has been dealt with at a profound level by Buddhist, Taoist, Esoteric Buddhist, Zen and other thinkers. Dialectic offers two laws in particular that are extremely helpful when foreseeing the future of capitalist societies: the “law of development through spiral process” and the “law of development through interpenetration of opposing objects.”

**What is the law of development through spiral process?*

This is the law which says that the world develops as if it were climbing a spiral staircase. In other words, if you look from the side at people ascending a spiral staircase, they appear to be progressing and developing because they are heading upward. However, if you look at them from above, they complete one revolution and return to their original positions. Therefore it appears that the revival and restoration of old things occur. But on a spiral staircase, people do not merely return to their original positions; they always move to a higher level. Similarly, in “spiral development,” there is not simply revival and restoration. Rather, something develops to a new stage and this enables old things to add new value as they are revived and restored.

**What are specific examples of the law of development through spiral process?*

For example, two leading-edge business models which have emerged from the Internet revolution: the “Net auction” and the “reverse auction.” These models are, in fact, revivals of old nostalgic business models. Previously, before the development of capitalism, trading methods such as “bidding” and “limit pricing” existed in every market. Having once been eclipsed by the development of capitalism demanding rationalization, they have gained new life as a result of the Net revolution. But there is a difference: while one could bid or limit prices with only several hundreds of people in the past, the Net auctions and reverse auctions can involve millions of participants. These methods have indeed revived at a higher level of the spiral staircase. Likewise, e-mail represents a revival of the nostalgic culture of “letter writing” within the context of a new system. And e-learning is certainly the revival of “private tutoring” and other forms of individualized learning in a more advanced and sophisticated form.

**What then is the law of development through interpenetration of opposing objects?*

It is the law which says that things which oppose and compete with each other come to resemble each other through interpenetration. For example, the policies of opposing political parties, such as those of the Conservative and Labor Parties in the UK, end up becoming alike. The way in which capitalism and socialism have learned from each other’s policies, adopting approaches to social welfare on the one hand and the principles of market competition on the other, is another case in point.

The Voluntary Economy will Revive through Spiral Development

**Then, based on these two laws of dialectic, what will happen in capitalist societies in the future?*

Capitalism will evolve into an entirely different form of capitalism in the future. This is because such spiral development and interpenetration will occur in the “economic principles” on which capitalism has traditionally been premised.

**Specifically, what affect will the law of spiral development have on these economic principles?*

In capitalist societies today, the economic principle that so clearly predominates is the “monetary economy.” However, the oldest economic principle in human society, the “voluntary economy,” will revive and begin to have a major impact on society.

**What kind of economic principle is the voluntary economy?*

The capitalism of today is premised on an economic principle called the monetary economy. The monetary economy is an economic activity in which people act with the aim of “acquiring money.” By contrast, the voluntary economy is an economic activity in which people act with the aim not of “acquiring money” but of “satisfying mind.” In other words, in a voluntary economy people cooperate out of goodwill and kindness, share their knowledge and wisdom, and work together in a spontaneous way.

**Is the voluntary economy an old economic principle?*

Yes. The voluntary economy is actually the oldest economic principle in human history. This is because before “money” was invented and the monetary economy came into being, humankind carried out its economic activity in the “barter economy” (the exchange economy), in which things were exchanged directly for other things. But in the primitive communities that existed before barter arose, the “gift economy” prevailed, in which people gave things of value to other people out of goodwill and kindness. In such communities, in other words, the voluntary economy was front and center.

**Did the voluntary economy disappear because of the development of society?*

No, that is not what happened. The “voluntary economy” has consistently remained an important economic principle throughout human history. It is because that even today certain kinds of economic activity, such as housework, child care, education in the home, caring for the elderly, community service, and so on, are occurring without an exchange of money in every corner of society, based on goodwill and kindness and on friendship and affection among people. Therefore, if the voluntary economy ceased to exist, the monetary economy would also, at that very moment, be forced to halt its activities. Let us say, for example, that families no longer provided any education to children on matters of discipline or manners. In this case, with only school education to rely on, society would no longer produce any talented people capable of working cooperatively.

The Internet Revolution will Accelerate Spiral Development and Interpenetration of Opposing Objects in the Economy

**Despite such obvious importance, why has the voluntary economy not been valued very highly until now?*

There are two reasons why the voluntary economy was relegated to the position of a “shadow economy” in the long course of human history. The first is that its activities were limited to the “narrow domains” of the household or the community. The second is that the true picture of this economy remained “invisible” because it could not be evaluated in terms of the objective measure of “money.”

**If that is so, why will this voluntary economy now revive and begin increasing its impact in coming society?*

It is because the Internet revolution has occurred. As a result of this revolution, conditions have changed. Firstly, the Net revolution has liberated the voluntary economy from the bonds of these “narrow domains.” In the Internet community today, people from around the world can gather, share their knowledge and wisdom, and cooperate with one another. Their activities can then have a global impact through the Internet. Secondly, the Net revolution has made the voluntary economy “visible.” Although its activities still cannot be evaluated quantitatively in terms of “money,” these activities can now be seen by large numbers of people through the “Net.” The Linux Community, in which engineers from around the world gather without compensation and continue to develop and improve this operating system, is a representative case.

A Hybrid Economy will Emerge through Interpenetration of Opposing Objects

**As the voluntary economy continues to exert a greater impact, what else will occur as a result?*

The second law of dialectic will come into play, which is the “law of development through interpenetration of opposing objects.” Consequently, economic principles will take a major evolutionary step forward.

**What affect will the law of interpenetration of opposing objects have on economic principles?*

The two principles that now stand in opposition, the monetary economy and the voluntary economy, will begin to interpenetrate and merge. This will give rise to a “new economic principle” which we should call the “hybrid economy.”

**Is this a theoretical forecast based on dialectic?*

No, this principle is already a reality. Take, for example, Amazon.com, the Internet bookseller. In the context of the monetary economy, Amazon.com has created an extremely profitable business model. But, the most popular service on its site is the grassroots reviews, which owes its existence to the voluntary economy. In other words, Amazon.com’s business model arises out of a hybrid economy and is not merely a “business model” but rather something that should be called a new “social system.” Another example is the rapidly expanding method of “prosumer-based product development.” In this method, “companies that make products” (producers) gather in the Net community with “people who use them” (consumers); both sides share knowledge and wisdom, and cooperate in the task of developing new products and services. This business model, too, is supported by the voluntary activity of consumers. It should thus also be referred to as a social system that has emerged from a hybrid economy.

**Do these activities occur only in the world of the Internet?*

No, these kinds of activities also occur frequently in the real world. But there is one major reason why so many examples of spiral development and interpenetration of dialectical laws can be found in the Internet world. This is because, as indicated by the terms “dog year” and “mouse year,” the changes to things in this world are accelerating; and what once took place over a period of seven or eighteen years now happens in a single year. As a result, whereas we human beings once ascended the spiral staircase leisurely over several hundred years, we are “running up” the stairs in several decades. That is why today the theme of the dialectical development of society, which was once the purview of historians and philosophers, is now an everyday concern for politicians, administrators and managers.

**What then are some examples of the hybrid economy occurring in the real world?*

In fact, the most emblematic examples of the hybrid economy are the trends toward “corporate social responsibility” (CSR) and “social entrepreneurship.”

Alliance between Companies and Social Entrepreneurs will Prompt an Evolution of Capitalism

**Why does CSR reflect a movement toward a hybrid economy?*

The CSR movement has become a major global trend, as evidenced by the ISO's formulation of international standards with respect to CSR. And, in recent years, this movement has extended beyond the narrow scope of simply compliance or corporate ethics and has moved toward a more broadly encompassing approach of how to contribute to society as a company. These movements by companies whose essential aim is to earn "business profits" represent an increasing recognition of the value of "social contributions," and can be seen, so to speak, as interpenetration from the monetary economy toward the voluntary economy.

**Why does social entrepreneurship reflect a movement toward a hybrid economy?*

On the other hand, social entrepreneurship has also become a major global trend. Social entrepreneurship arose in response to the increasingly severe difficulties that traditional non-profit organizations are having in sustaining their undertakings as government supports and benefactors contribution are discontinued. To overcome these problems, social entrepreneurs attempt to generate profits from their own undertakings and to use these profits to achieve organizational independence and sustainability. These movements by organizations whose essential aim is "social contributions" represent an increasing recognition of the value of "business profits," and can be seen, so to speak, as interpenetration from the voluntary economy toward the monetary economy.

**What will be the movements of CSR and social entrepreneurship from now?*

Based on the law of interpenetration of dialectic, the movements of CSR and social entrepreneurship will inevitably converge over the long term. In other words, what have traditionally been referred to as "for-profit companies" and "non-profit organizations" will evolve and interpenetrate each other, resulting in all companies and organizations eventually becoming what are called "social enterprises." To put it another way, whether the organization is a large corporation or a small venture start-up, a NPO or a social venture, the age will come when all organizations whatever their form will be compelled to respond simultaneously to two challenges, posed in the following two questions. The first question is "Through businesses, what is the organization doing to contribute to society or to bring about social change?" The second question is "How will the organization earn profits from its undertakings

in order to sustain the organization's undertakings?" In a fundamental sense, all companies and organizations will have to succeed in establishing the viability of both social contributions and business profits.

**Specifically, what should be done to promote a paradigm shift towards the hybrid economy and to encourage many companies to evolve into social enterprises?*

We can do this by pursuing a "social alliance," which can be described as a situation where for-profit companies and social entrepreneurs ally each other and seek to evolve into social enterprises through an exchange of knowledge and wisdom and mutual learning. This kind of alliance differs from the ordinary "business alliances" in that both parties aim to co-evolve into a social enterprise. Specifically, it is considered that for-profit companies would provide social entrepreneurs with brands, marketing channels, and business know-how, while social entrepreneurs would provide for-profit companies with grassroots consumer networks, grassroots consumers' voice, know-how about operating voluntary communities, and other input. Already, a coffee-shop-chain company is providing access to its network of stores to a social entrepreneur who is engaged in efforts to establish fair trade in the coffee business. In return, the social entrepreneur is providing the company with an opportunity to contribute to society. In the coming age, companies are likely to pursue "social alliances" as one vital aspect of their CSR.

**What kind of enterprises will such social enterprises evolve into?*

They will evolve into "earth enterprises." In this era of the global environmental problems, social enterprises that recognize their responsibilities toward "society" and seek to contribute to society will invariably become aware of their responsibilities toward "the Earth" as a whole, and then aim to become companies that contribute to the sustainability of the living system that is the Earth. The hybrid economy in which these "earth enterprises" are rooted will, in fact, go on to play an extremely important role in solving the global environmental problems.

**In what way will the hybrid economy play an important role in solving the global environmental problems?*

Until now, a method from economics known as the "internalization of external cost" has primarily been relied on to solve the environmental problems. This is a method to bring "external costs," which arise outside the market economy, such as the damage caused by environmental destruction, into the market through environmental regulation and have them reflected in company costs. This can be considered a method to

pay for the cost of environmental destruction by bringing these costs within the monetary economy. Emissions trading which deals with the problem of global warming is a concrete example of this approach. In addition, however, to solve the global environmental problems, the methods that link the monetary economy and the voluntary economy, that is, methods that utilize the hybrid economy will become extremely important hereafter.

**Specifically, what are some of these methods?*

For example, there are “carbon offset products.” These can be described as follows: When a company sells a certain product, it promises to use a part of the selling price of the product to capture the identical amount of CO₂ that is emitted during the manufacturing of that product. These carbon offset products tie the “business models” of companies to the “voluntary minds” of consumers and can be considered a new system of the hybrid economy. On the other hand, the use of what is called “corporate currency,” which includes such things as airline mileage and credit card membership rewards programs, is expanding today. A system in which consumers donate this corporate currency to NPOs or social entrepreneurs of their choice has emerged. This, too, can be considered a new system of the hybrid economy.

A Paradigm Shift toward Participatory Innovation will Occur

**Then, when a paradigm shift in “economic principles” occurs, what will happen next in capitalist societies?*

A paradigm shift in “innovation” will occur. That is to say, we see a paradigm shift from traditional “beneficiary innovation” toward “participatory innovation.”

**What kind of innovation is “participatory innovation?”*

Until now, in capitalist societies, something called “beneficiary innovation” has prevailed. In this innovation, a small number of exceptionally talented experts drive innovation in technologies and products, in services and businesses, and in systems and institutions, while a large number of people are placed in the position of merely receiving the benefits of such innovation. However, in societies in the near future, a large number of people will begin participating directly in the process of innovation. Examples of such participation include prosumer-based product development and open-source policy making. These are illustrations of what we might call “participatory innovation.”

**What does the paradigm shift toward participatory innovation mean for social entrepreneurs?*

The role of social entrepreneurs is to drive “social innovation.” When social innovation and participatory innovation become linked together, social innovation becomes an even larger and more powerful trend.

Direct Democracy will also Revive in the Fields of Economy and Culture

**When this kind of paradigm shift in “innovation” occurs, what will happen next in capitalist societies?*

A major paradigm shift will occur in “democracy.” It is because direct democracy expands not only in the domain of politics but also in the domains of economy and culture.

**What does “direct democracy in economy and culture” mean?*

Firstly, as a result of the Internet revolution, a large number of people are finding it easy to express their own opinions and ideas. So, rather than traditional “indirect democracy,” where people choose decision makers and delegate their decision making to them, this revolution has facilitated the establishment of “direct democracy,” where people participate directly in decision making. Therefore, a paradigm shift to “direct democracy” will occur in various fields from now. This kind of direct democracy will then become a reality not only in the domain of politics but also in the domains of economy and culture. Traditionally, it was generally thought that democracy was a political problem. In fact, however, it has been an economic and cultural problem as well. And, the traditional economy and culture have long been placed in a condition of indirect democracy.

**What constitutes direct democracy in the domain of economy?*

In the world of economy, although a large number of consumers had different and diverse needs, companies comprehended these needs through the broad-brush approach of the “market research.” Almost as if, as a consequence, they had adopted the “representative system,” companies have developed products to meet the largest common denominator and supplied these products to the market. However, in the coming age, because of the expanding use of the following three methods, prosumer-based development, Long Tail marketing, and high-mix low-volume production, consumers will say what they truly want in a product and actually be able to obtain

these products. In other words, direct democracy in product development will become a reality. Similarly, today rapidly expanding “affiliate programs,” in which consumers recommend products that they like and encourage others to purchase them on their personal websites and blogs, can be viewed, in one sense, as the realization of direct democracy in marketing.

**What then constitutes direct democracy in the domain of culture?*

Until now, in capitalist societies, as in economy, culture has also been created through the representative system and indirect democracy. For example, in the world of music, artists have been discovered by a few major labels or large production companies, which then have engineered booms and have created musical culture. However, in the coming age, a large number of people will easily be able to compose and perform their own music and release it to the rest of the world over the Internet. They will also be able freely to review and recommend the music of their favorite artists. For a large number of people, this will signify the realization of direct democracy in the creation of culture and the beginning of “an era in which culture is personally created” instead of “an era in which culture is unilaterally provided.”

**Then, why is direct democracy in economy and culture important?*

It is because it will change people’s consciousness of democracy. Until now, democracy has been understood as participation in the “decision making” process of society. However, through the realization of direct democracy in economy and culture, the consciousness of a large number of people will begin to change. In other words, the meaning of democracy for many people will change. It will come to mean not merely participation in “decision making” but participation in “social innovation.”

Knowledge Capitalism will Deepen into “Empathy Capitalism”

**When a paradigm shift in “democracy” occurs, what will happen next in capitalist societies?*

The paradigm of “knowledge capitalism” will change. “Knowledge capitalism” can be defined as capitalism in which the most important management resource is knowledge capital. In the society of the future, however, as participatory innovation takes center stage and direct democracy in economy and culture spreads, the meaning of the term “knowledge capital” will fundamentally change.

**Why will the meaning of knowledge capital change?*

It is because we will enter an age of “collective intelligence.” In other words, in the era of participatory innovation and direct democracy in economy and culture, it will become crucial to utilize the wisdom of many people at the grassroots as well as the knowledge of a small number of experts. In the context of the Internet revolution, this wisdom is referred to as “collective intelligence” or “wisdom of crowds.” Companies in the coming age will be required to utilize such collective intelligence as knowledge capital.

**Then, what is important for utilizing collective intelligence?*

One might venture to call it “empathy capital.” In other words, the degree to which those companies obtain empathy from consumers becomes extremely important. This is because collective intelligence is not a management resource in the monetary economy which can be merchandised with “monetary capital”; rather, it is a management resource in the voluntary economy. To put it differently, collective intelligence is a management resource that can be exchanged for something that we should call “empathy capital,” which includes empathy, trust and a good reputation from the consumer. And, for companies in the coming age, “empathy capital” will become especially important. Therefore, today’s knowledge capitalism will deepen into something that we should call “empathy capitalism.”

**What then should companies do to obtain “empathy capital?”*

Above all, companies must evolve into “social enterprises” which highly value their contributions to society. They must then also evolve into “earth enterprises.”

Capitalist Societies will Evolve into Living Systems

**Then, what kind of societies will emerge when capitalist societies become characterized by terms such as the Internet revolution, the hybrid economy, participatory innovation, direct democracy in economy and culture, empathy capitalism, and the like?*

The capitalist societies of the future will become an extremely sophisticated and advanced “living system,” in which “living phenomena” frequently occur. Such phenomena include self-organization and emergence, evolution and co-evolution, the formation of ecosystems and the butterfly effect, and so forth.

**Then, why will capitalist societies evolve into “living systems?”*

It is because companies, markets and societies will increasingly take on the properties of “complex systems.” In other words, the Internet revolution, the hybrid economy, participatory innovation, direct democracy in economy and culture, and empathy capitalism all enhance the inter-relationship of people within companies, markets and societies, causing them to heighten the “complexity” of such systems. The cultural anthropologist Gregory Bateson once said that “In complex things, life dwells.” As Bateson pointed out, as the complexity of systems increases, they do indeed begin to display behaviors of living systems.

**Why will the terms which characterize the future capitalist societies mentioned above enhance the inter-relationship of people in companies, markets and societies?*

There are three reasons for this. Firstly, the Internet revolution will amplify the informational connections among people in companies, markets and societies. Secondly, the hybrid economy and empathy capitalism will connect people closely together not only through financial relationships but also through relationships based on goodwill, kindness, empathy, and trust. Thirdly, participatory innovation and direct democracy will increase people’s motivation to connect with each other.

**What will happen when capitalist societies increasingly take on the properties of living systems?*

Of particular importance in this regard is the “butterfly effect.” As expressed metaphorically, “when a butterfly flutters its wings in Beijing, it sets off a hurricane in New York,” meaning that a slight fluctuation in a small part of a system will cause large changes in the system as a whole. This can sometimes appear in negative forms, such as when the economic failure of one industry in one country sparks a worldwide recession. On the other hand, it is also possible that a single social entrepreneur or a single social enterprise can change the direction of the world in a positive way. In other words, social entrepreneurs and social enterprises will be able to use the “evolution of capitalism” as a tailwind and “wisdom to cope with living systems” as a rudder in changing society in the coming age.

**Then, where can the wisdom to deal with capitalist societies as living systems be found?*

Unfortunately, much of this kind of wisdom cannot be found inside modern civilization, which has developed on the basis of the mechanical system paradigm. Such wisdom, in fact, exists in the “old civilizations” which are found in each country.

The reason is that, without exception, old civilizations in each country formed the foundation to the kind of wisdom that emerged from the living system paradigm. Such wisdom includes knowing how to live in harmony with the environment, how to create empathy in society, and how to temper the insatiable desires of the human beings. Consequently, in the process of evolution, capitalist societies of the future will incorporate the wisdom which resides in old civilizations and give birth to a “new civilization.” That evolution is also a process of spiral development and interpenetration, that is, exactly the dialectical development of human civilization.