

This piece of writing seeks to explore how the needs of the economy, society and environment are unable to be effectively balanced in the contemporary world. The piece will begin by exploring a some history of sustainability and the goals proposed three decades ago and how these have not yet been found successful (Baker, 2006). Following on, the responsibility of sustainable development will be discussed followed by the complexity of knowledge (Serrat, 2017) and how it influences culture and decisions made across society and by individuals (Maio and Hacddock, 2010). Finally the moral imperative of intergenerational justice will display the conflict of interest it has upon living generations (Boonin, 2014).

The term sustainable development gained momentum in 1987 with a report from the United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development named 'Our Common Future' (Baker, 2006). This report defined sustainable development as 'meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs' (Brundtland, 1987, pg.5). This idea recognised a link between human development with managing the natural resources of the planet, aimed to set long term development goals and emphasizing the value of inter-generational equity (Young, 1997). The aim of these goals and the targets are to diminish the inequalities among humankind and preserve the environment, while striving to increase economy growth (Blowers, Boersema and Martin, 2012). In 1992, Agenda 21 proposed targets to be achieved by the 21st century, yet in finding their targets overambitious, the United Nations (UN) in 2000 produced eight Millennium Development Goals (MDG) which, when reviewed in 2015, multiplied once more to seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) with the new target date becoming 2030 (Hess, 2016). The continuous movement and fluctuation of these goals suggest a lack of clarity or lack of compatibility in the paradigmatic shift (Martinez, Peattle and Brust, 2019).

A further postulation towards sustainable development is the Triple Bottom Line Theory that was popularised by Elkington in the late 1990's and it has influenced corporate responsibility alongside financial performance (Robins, 2006). This triangular theory highlights people, planet and profit as three areas that must be considered in decision making and when all three areas are considered, an enhanced standard of life is recognized to be possible (Elkington, 1997). However, it can also be argued that individuals develop in the environment that is present at the time of their being , and so must create the identity and history that they

desire in which they have appeared (Fritsch, 2019). The notion of an enhanced standard of life is changeable with the emergence of new knowledge and cultural changes, all of which will foster a new way to manage with the new external environment (Serrat, 2017).

Furthermore, as a consequence of emerging knowledge, advances in technology have made it possible to see that the Earth's resources are not limitless, and that care must be taken to preserve and regenerate such finite resources (Boonin, 2014). The extraction of resources, pollution and the movement of wildlife introduced by humans has left the planet drained of its natural non-renewable resources and its ecosystem in critical danger (Hess, 2016). It is the decisions of humanity that can be seen here, on one side humanity is criticized for using such resources (Baker, 2006) and on the other side they are applauded, acknowledging that these past decisions have enhanced development, to be the world we know today (Van Lange *et al*, 2014). This broadening concept and lack of clarity in the definition of sustainability began to be perceived as a political platform of words with vague and contradictory concepts (Richardson, 1997).

In an attempt to overcome the personal distancing achieved by politics, anthropocentrism places humanity in the centre, although it has been criticised for detaching itself from the value of nature, however throughout the development of scientific knowledge it has been suggested that the human mind was above any other matter (Serrat, 2017). The complexity of knowledge which is available to humanity has led each generation to make their own choice on what was important, and scarcity has led to innovation for the next generation (Serrat, 2017). This is a core claim of rational choice theory, this explains how individuals will seek to fulfil goals by reinforcing their preference (Scott, 2000). Individual action is underlined with motivation and so individual behaviour can become predictable if the motivation is clear (Hechter and Kanazawa, 1997). The current culture is driven by overconsumption and instant gratification, which has created a social dilemma between the present and long-term interest of sustainability (Tarditi *et al*, 2020). As society became predictable and dependant upon this culture, business began to use built in obsolescence for economic gain (Hess, 2016). Thus presently, greater awareness is arising regarding the long-term collective investment that must be made today to ensure future generations have enough resources to develop in years to come (Van Lange *et al*, 2014).

This balancing act of current and future aims meets a humanity that seeks satisfaction and pleasure whilst aiming to avoid pain and disappointment. This understanding of human behaviour has been present across many centuries and can be backdated to ancient Greek philosophers, who debated whether short-term pain should be tolerated for a better long-term outcome and vice-versa, whether short term pleasure should be accepted over a painful future (Van Lange *et al*, 2014). This debate presented by the ancient Greeks still lies at the heart of society today and of sustainable development, however it can not be ignored that self-interest is too a character trait of humans (Baker, 2006). Gandhi said, ‘There is enough in the world for everybody’s need, but not enough for everybody’s greed’ (Larrea, 2011, pg.263). Perfectly summing up these opposing dynamic, for this reason, investing in people and the planet requires more incentive and persuasion for cooperation than the economy if all needs are to be met (Han and Stieha, 2020).

As aforementioned, consumerism and immediacy are this cultures king and so the economy has grown. Economic growth embraces a system that has strengthened with globalisation as transnational connections have become less bound by time and space. Globalisation is a multidimensional process comprised of complex and conflicting processes (Axford, 2000). Boundaries disappeared for global systems to take place, this has generated interconnection alongside fragmentation, but also offered the possibility to create alternative imagined worlds. This has led to an increase in power going to large corporations which is having a negative effect upon the people and planet as they are undermined by the profit made in the globalised system (Hess, 2016; Crawford and Novak, 2014). Take for example British Petroleum (BP), a very profitable UK company with a \$283 billion revenue is ranked 8th in the Global 500 (Fortune, 2020). BP are focussed on reducing carbon levels, improving products and creating business with a ‘reduce, improve, create’ framework (BP, 2019, pg.41) Simultaneously, in the UK, at least 1 in 10 households are living in fuel poverty (National Statistics, 2020). Making profits and economic growth is favoured in a capitalist society, therefore the ‘the imbalance in power relations is concomitant with persistent political power and social inequality’ (Blowers, Boersema and Martin, 2012, pg. 6). Again, demonstrating the economy’s favoured position.

The concept of morality is emphasized through interaction with one another and is influenced by the expected consistency of actions that are proposed by the social contexts and social

normality (Lock and Strong, 2010). A lifestyle that benefits others is becoming increasingly important, and as resources deplete, adaptive behaviour is necessary (Tarditi et al, 2020). Human behaviour must be considered in sustainability because it is accompanied by moral principles that guide decision making and a sense of justice (Ariansen, 1999). As a result, established understandings emerge where people are expected to keep these ways, which in turn, maintain the trust of the already established moral governance (Lock and Strong, 2010). This offers an explanation as to why one solution for sustainable development is unrealistic and why multiple viewpoints will continue to be present in the future (Baker, 2006). Since social contexts and social normality are in constant change, then so is also, the sense of what is expected and the understanding of what is morally correct (Maio and Haddock, 2010).

Consequently, the greed line, defined by Larrea (2011, pg.263) as ‘the maximum ethically acceptable individual consumption in the current global economy’ suggests that a code of ethics must exist and that decisions are either acceptable or unacceptable. Free market ideology states that individuals would not choose to be ethically minded unless there is a price to pay for being greedy or a punishment involved (Snowdon, 2015). Greed and excess are perceived more negatively by society when the social impact is little, however if the social impact is greater such greed can become to be respected (Oka and Kuijt, 2014). Thus bringing the economy and society to a closer harmony. Theorists continue to seek and debate whether humanity is naturally inclined toward cooperation or selfishness as a parallel desire and common want of humanity is that the world would become a better place in the future than the current lived in society (Snowdon, 2015).

Finally, in this last section, intergenerational justice will be discussed as the latter half of sustainable development definitions are concerned with ‘future generations being able to meet their own needs’ (Brundtland, 1987, pg.5). Justice for future generations has become a key slogan for the case of sustainability, promoting intergenerational justice by making ethical choices in the present (Ariansen, 1999). Concepts of intergenerational justice create conflict of interest and moral problems for those presently living (Barry, 1997) because it requires present generations to ‘give up or take on burdens and to act on behalf of future generations’ (Wade-Benzoni, 2002, pg. 1011). Descending reciprocity implies that the present generation owes to future generations and implies that a larger capital than the one received must be passed on

(Duckworth, 2013). This moral imperative is fundamental to the way in which living humans consider future generations and their wellbeing. The non-identity problem argues that the future is made up of many possibilities which will be determined by the decisions made by its predecessors. Thus, since the future generations do not yet exist, no harm can be done to make their life worse or of poorer quality (Boonin, 2014).

‘A living individual does not precede its history and habitat, which is thus no secondary attribute, but owes itself to the environment of its emergence and existence’ (Fritsch, 2019, p.41).

As has been explored, many theories and policies have been developed over the last decades, however many injustices continue to remain across the diverse lives that are experienced. Sustainable development is a shifting discourse that will vary depending on where one lives, when one lives and the threats that are closely lived or experienced (Blowers, Boersema and Martin, 2012). The egoistic nature of human beings challenges sustainable development as personal success and wealth are greatly desired and culturally acceptable to pursue (Van Lange *et al*, 2014). And the current values of those who have the power to make long lasting decisions, on a macro scale, must be redirected from economic profit to sustainable human development for the model of sustainability to be effectively balanced (Oka and Kuijt, 2014; Baker, 2006).

Sustainable development is bound by the present values that society entertains, and goals are set in response to what is believed to be good, acceptable or desirable (Maio and Haddock, 2010). Seeking to enhance the lives of future generations without enhancing the lives of the currently living is farcical and it would be absurd to believe that such risks and problems would now be conquered and an image of the past (Hess, 2016). The present needs of the poor and the limitations of the environment have been exposed as social and political constructs that need to be addressed in the present so that future generations can live in a better place (Marshall, 1997), yet human behaviour remains hedonistic and will continue to place itself above the needs of others when making decisions (Larrea, 2011).

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