

From Economic to Sustainable Development - Unfolding the Concept of Law

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Abstract

The paper presents an analysis of the interrelationship of law, policy and knowledge under conditions of globalization. The paper's basic premise is that the emergence of the sustainable development policy has been driven by an expanding awareness of the world as a singular and interdependent entity. My principal argument is that the policy of sustainable development is part of a wider epistemic shift, - which means that we - the global community at large - understand the world differently today than 50-60 years ago when the United Nations and the Bretton Woods inspired institutions were established. The theory of change underlying the policy represents, therefore, a shift from the model of economic development, which builds on the idea of separation and functional specialization, to model of sustainable development, which builds on interdependence and integration.

I suggest that the sustainable development policy provides us with a key to develop a common theoretical framework for explaining the implications of the epistemic shift, but, that giving effect to the shift will require research and co-operation between a wide range of disciplines. I further suggest that expanding the concept of law provides a necessary condition for making the epistemic shift operational in a new paradigm in a global governance context.

In conclusion, I propose that the theoretical insight from the policy provides the resources to answer the post-modern crisis of truth, which in essence is a crisis of reality, self and language. In fact, I propose that sustainable development has the potential for enabling a change equivalent to that of the Copernican revolution, which concerned man's place in the cosmos, while sustainable development concerns man's place in the biosphere. Effectuating the change will, however, require a fundamental willingness of the global scholarly community to engage with - and not merely describe, prescribe, or measure - reality and the human condition.

Keywords: political philosophy, cognition; many-valued conception of reality

Introduction

The present paper is based on my recently defended thesis "From Economic to Sustainable Development - Enlarging the Concept of Law". The thesis consists of two parts. The first is concerned with the meaning of sustainable development and the second is concerned with sustainable development and the concept of law in a global age.

The analysis requires that I cast my net wide, because the very point is to demonstrate a systemic relationship between knowledge, cognition, logic and languages and how this field can provide a coherent framework for thinking about law and governance under conditions of globalization. This brief paper should, therefore, only be seen as providing the material for a debate about the interpretation of sustainable development as an epistemic shift and more importantly for debating the implications for conceptions of reality, logic, normativity and languages, which must be further elaborated, if we are to give effect to the rationality embedded in the epistemology of the policy.

In part I of the thesis "The Meaning of Sustainable Development" I provide a chronicle of the development of the policy and an account of how the legal discipline has responded to the policy as background for theorizing the policy through an integration analysis. I argue that our realization and understanding of the condition of interdependence can be expressed as following a rule-based theory of cognition. To conceptualize the process of cognition, I use the metaphor of an operating system. Fundamentally, the operating system is structured as a "complexity reduction rule" created by the prevailing world view. Furthermore, the interface between individual cognition and societal communication and action can be construed by re-describing the concept of law as legal culture and including a set of tertiary rules, thus articulating cognition as a third order framework for conceptualizing the normative and for communication and action. The model is of general relevance as an analytical framework and as such it can be seen as a theoretical contribution distinct from but integral to the policy and practice of sustainable development.

The Meaning of Sustainable Development

Sustainable development was launched as a global policy concept in the 1987 Brundtland Report. In hindsight, the Report has succeeded greatly in establishing sustainable development as a "must" policy concept on a par with democracy and economic development. The background for the evolution of the policy was a growing awareness of the environmental deterioration caused by the economic development process as it was preached and practiced after the Second World War combined with the political tensions created by the growing disparity between North and South. The challenges and conflicts relating to the environment have been addressed within the framework of the United Nations at three major conferences: Stockholm 1972, Rio 1992 and Johannesburg 2002. The Brundtland Report (*Our Common Future*, 1987, 43) contains the authoritative characterization of the concept "sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." However, since its inception, the policy concept has been perceived as vague, ambiguous and inherently conflicting. Analytically the debates over the meaning of the term can be seen as revolving around three general questions:

- Is sustainable development about integrating environmental considerations into the economic development process or is it about a development process of a different quality?
- Is sustainable development fundamentally a political, legal economic or environmental/ecological concept?
- Is the concept inherently conflicting and what is the nature of the contradiction?

The perceived conflicts have created problems for policy implementation and have been addressed by subordinating the idea of sustainable development to the conceptual machinery of a particular discipline, for example, economics (Pearce, 2000). In order to develop an analytical framework for studying the relationship between law and sustainable development I have undertaken a conceptual analysis of the policy (Sartori, 1984). Based on this analysis I propose that the meaning of the policy has developed over time and I conclude that philosophically speaking sustainable development is not longer only about integration of environmental considerations into the economic development process it is about a development process of a different nature. The core meaning of this process includes:

- Recognition of the science-supported knowledge of global environmental interdependence and the related strategy of integration
- Satisfaction of needs and the necessity for upholding of the biosphere
- And the process of participation, which philosophically reflects the reality of interdependence of the power and vulnerability of individual agency.

In conclusion the policy is an empirical entity implying certain kind of constitutive ideas, but it lacks a theoretical framework to specify these ideas, in particular their internal relationship - is there hierarchy or how to express the unity of the ideas in an operational way? The policy itself points to integration as a strategy for change. Therefore, in what follows I turn to integration theory. As explained in *Social Science Concepts - A Systematic Analysis* (Teune, 1984, 235-264), the term "integration" refers to a highly complex concept. Teune provides an historical account of the rise and fall of the concept of integration within social sciences - i.e., sociology, economics and political science - after World War II. He notes that, in international relations, the term "interdependence" seems to have replaced integration since the world crisis of 1973. It is, however, the more theoretical and methodological points that are of interest in relations to the integration strategy advanced by the sustainable development policy.

According to Teune integration is a relatively precise logical concept:

Integration belongs in the class of concepts that relate to the very core of what we believe we know about the social world. It directly involves the age-old problem of "can the whole be more than a sum of its parts?" - ... - The concept of integration says that indeed the whole is more than the sum of its parts in particular ways and that answer implies ideologies (Teune, 237).

It is also a general concept, which can be applied to a wide variety of phenomena, because:

Despite the apparent diversity of meaning of the term integration, there is a core one. The basic idea of integration is old. It is part of the concept of a system: 'The root idea of system is that of structure or organization, of integration into an orderly whole that functions as an organic unity' (Rescher, 1979). So conceived, integration is a property of relationships among components or parts of a system (Teune, 256). ... A core idea of a system is structure and structures determine some range of behavior of a system. To define and explain political, social or economic behavior requires defining the structures of systems that condition their behavior. Conditions are structural if they are determined largely by factors other than the integrations processes themselves (Teune, 242).

Further, Teune says that:

Because it is a "connection", integration can refer to both a state and to a process by which things come together, or indeed, are taken apart (disintegration). ... Knowing the state of something at one point in time does not necessarily say anything about the past and future states. And, as will be discussed, this is a source of conceptual confusion, for what must be known to define a state of a system is different from that to define a system process. The first requires a language for measurement the latter a theory of change (Teune, 239).

We have seen that an impressive "language of measurement" has been generated for sustainable development and I suggest that this dual meaning of integration, referring to both state and process, is creating not only conceptual confusion but also difficulties in the concrete implementation of the sustainable development policy, where there is an emphasis on taking action towards achieving measurable state of sustainable development while leaving the fundamental core - the basic assumption - underlying the development process barely recognized, let alone explicitly addressed.

Now, according to sustainable development we must integrate because we know we are interdependent. Therefore, I propose that we must address our system of knowledge and not merely the system of, for instance, ecology or economics. If we integrate the components of the core meaning of sustainable development the meaning can be conceptualized as a system of knowledge, where the relationships between the I and the world - and how we can acquire knowledge about it - is based on awareness of interdependence. This awareness then becomes the constitutive structural framework for developing the rationality of discourse and action for upholding the biosphere as a necessary condition for human development

Thus, if the nature of reality and the human condition is interdependence, the rules of inference for generating knowledge logically imply acknowledging:

- An idea of a whole, however elusive, which is more than the aggregate of the particulars. Thus the understanding of the particular as being inherently related to the whole and vice versa implies that we cannot have the one without the other, and, therefore, there is, in the abstract, no a priori argument for the importance of the one over the other.
- Complexity i.e., the "butterfly effect". In general terms, this expression can be explained as a metaphor for the fact that action at the level of the particular will affect the whole and not only the separate target and identifiable externalities, because the whole is infinitely complex in its interrelatedness and as such not predictable.
- Complexity in turn implies uncertainty, that knowledge is not merely found but also co-created, and that we cannot know all.

On this background, I conclude that the theoretical insight embedded in the vision of sustainable development is related to our knowledge of "what is", i.e., to the ontological starting point for our perception of the nature of reality and how we can acquire knowledge about it. Consequently, the unit of analysis for integration at the conceptual level - i.e., for constructing a common denominator that can capture the defining characteristic of the composite concept of sustainable development - is our broadest system of knowledge as it relates to the fundamental perception and cognition of the world and the human condition. The policy captures the insight that the development process is conditioned on the absolute fact of interdependence. We can change the way we deal with this fact about our material condition, but it is a commonality we cannot escape. Interdependence is thus a condition determined by factors other than human processes and, applying Teune's theoretical framework for integration as defined above, it is a structural condition. "Developmental sustainability" a heuristic term to signify the difference between sustainable development based on aggregation of economic rationality with sustainable development activities and sustainable development based on integration of the elements of the concept into a rationality of its own. Thus "developmental sustainability" implies a development that focuses on sustaining the biosphere and satisfying needs, and that, in order to do so, must acknowledge and respect interdependence as a structural condition for communication and action. The construction which designates and articulates the world view as a structural condition for the generation of knowledge at the core of a conceptually integrated understanding of sustainable development explains knowledge as created in a relationship between an absolute fact about our material condition and a collective and individual interpretation of this fact. Understanding knowledge as created, instead of found, requires and enables a dynamic and hence many-valued conception of reality. This claim points to a long standing philosophical debate which I shall not provide evidence of here in as far as the members of this association have been in the forefront of the debate for now 50 years. Instead I shall postulate that the challenge, which has been identified, is that we are faced with a transition from a mechanical to a dynamic paradigm or world view. Although there is agreement on the fact of interdependence and the implied complexity and uncertainty, there is no agreement on how to conceptualize and theorize the implications. Instead each discipline extrapolates from within its own conceptual machinery and is not able to capture the implied whole, nor the nature of the process establishing the relationship to the parts.

Now the question is how to translate the implications of the epistemic shift represented by the policy into practice. This is an abstract, theoretical and a practical problem. Addressing here the abstract aspect of the problem, it is necessary to theorize which starts with asking "of what is this an instance?" When applied to the challenge of transporting the implications of the epistemology of the policy into practice, policy can be seen as an instance of normativity and practice can be seen as an instance of human conduct. Normativity and human conduct are instances of mind, and thus, transporting "developmental sustainability" requires, fundamentally, that the epistemology be embedded in individual agency, i.e. in the very standard of what constitutes knowledge and rational and legitimate behavior. Institutionalizing or transporting into practice via particular disciplines or concrete rules and institutions will not suffice.

Hypothesizing the Implications

The epistemology of the sustainable development policy is built on an evolving knowledge of the nature of "what is" as being interdependent thereby replacing a conceptualization of the essential nature of reality as consisting of separate objects which we can generate knowledge about by observation. Thus, I propose that, to fully put the policy into practice, a comprehensive elaboration of the implications of this knowledge is required. To that end, in what follows I identify a few of the fundamental implications involved in accepting interdependence as the defining principle of reality and the human condition.

First, in the abstract, interdependence implies complexity and uncertainty as a defining feature of the relationship between the I and the world, and this, in turn, implies that human beings can know something, but that it is valid knowledge - part of the concept of knowledge - that we cannot know all.

Second, interdependence also implies a conceptualization of the universal as distinct and as being constituted by the totality of interdependent particulars as opposed to the aggregate of particulars. Such conceptualization is not necessary if "what is" is seen as separate objects because they can be aggregated, so the universal is not different from its aggregates and thus the universal is non-existent as a distinct entity.

Third, the conceptualization of the integration of the policy elements results theoretically in establishing a coherent framework and an objective for a dynamic process of generating knowledge for action and development instead of merely postulating desired conditions such as freedom, which conceptually is only a relative fact. Furthermore, it reveals that knowledge is not only found by observation, but is equally created by the participating in the knowledge generating process.

Finally, seeing and understanding "what is" as defined by interdependence also encompasses a conception of the dynamic process of relating and not only a static state.

The policy and strategy of sustainable development has emerged in reaction to a model of knowledge according to which "what is" are objects. The theoretical implications of interdependence, therefore cannot be adequately expressed within the present rules for generation and expression of valid knowledge, which are structured as a binary code. This problem - i.e., being unable to express accurately what is known to be true - has to date been dealt with through, for example, complementarity.

The result is a concept of adequate knowledge, because although, for example, Newtonian mechanics suffices for landing spaceships on the moon, and Ptolemaic astronomy can be sufficient for navigation, the theories would be empirically false if claimed valid for all purposes.

Now, I propose that the need for representing complexity, uncertainty, and dynamic co-creation as aspects of the generation of valid knowledge for the global development process and human conduct in general first requires integration of these aspects into the form of representation of the ontological starting point for generating knowledge. In other words, it requires an elaboration of a many-valued ontology to enlarge and to complement the existing dualistic (binary) concept that represents the nature of reality as being adequately described as a material object or as a state.

To support the plausibility of such an approach, I for now merely provide an example of what is involved and also to indicate that the idea of a many-valued conception of reality has been addressed constructively within other professional fields such as holism and general systems sciences. Thus, although the ontology and the related epistemologies of the various fields might not be particularly relevant to governance and democracy in a global age, there is ample methodological experience available concerning applications of the approach. The purpose of the following example is to support my argument that the ontological starting point and the related structure of social and linguistic representation of knowledge about "what is" can be changed, and that this could have crucial impact on center

concepts such as valid knowledge and the conception of self and the world. In the following, I illustrate how the rules for generating and representing or expressing valid knowledge about "what is" can differ, which means that they are socially constructed and can be changed according to what is required based on the nature of a changing concept of knowledge.

The text following is taken out of its original Buddhist perspective (Jayatilke, 1968) on international law and adapted to the present purpose of illustrating the technicalities involved in representation of different systems of knowledge, i.e., different ontological starting points.

Aristotelian logic proposes: i) the universe is finite; ii) the universe is not finite. In a Buddhist perspective, it is proposed that the mutually exclusive and together exhaustive alternative would be brought into better focus by a four-fold form of predication as follows: i) the universe is finite (in all dimensions); ii) the universe is infinite (in all dimensions); iii) the universe is (partly) finite and (partly) infinite, i.e., both "finite" and "infinite"; iv) the universe is neither finite nor infinite, i.e., both "finite" and "infinite" cannot be predicated of the universe because the universe or the space is unreal.

The four-fold form would allow for a more differentiated and thus accurate representation of knowledge about the world and could capture its complexity and uncertainty, which is implied in choosing interdependence as a defining characterization of "what is". For example, as an integral part of our reasoning, the fourfold form both enables and requires us to reflect on what is known and what is largely unknown, thus making knowledge generation analytically distinct from but integral to choice. In particular, it enables expression of aspects relevant to both the particular and to the whole, thus making external (wider community) accountability integral to internal (among the parties) accountability as two aspects of the same action.

The four-fold form also reflects the fact that knowledge is not just found but is co-created, since not only the object, but also the choices of the subject have to be accounted for in the knowledge generating process. The reasoning and the action taken are based on a perspective that represents awareness and choice and not only a universal truth.

In short, it becomes possible to express valid knowledge as an approximation, and to communicate about reality as being a point or a degree of graduation along a continuum rather than an absolute state. It is a question of more or less, not either or.

Others have addressed the questions of ontology and language from the particular perspectives of entity, process or relation, as evidenced from the following quotes from Andreas Goppold's writings on the cognitive model of relation and on information and third order ontology. The quotes are rather extensive, because I find that his explanation, as they stand out of context, illustrate the issues of content and form to be discussed when addressing the problems of enabling a relational ontology.

Information and Third Order Ontology. The examples of entity, process, and relation, give a primary triadic categorization of being (i.e. a many-valued ontology), even though western philosophy would refrain from admitting at all that relation and process can be ontological categories. As the discussions between the Parmenides and Heraklit schools, anything in the world can be perceived either as state (entity) or in flow (process), and it was noted in the beginning (and by the Buddhist philosophy), that the world can also be perceived as a system of relations, thus showing that non-entity oriented systems of ontology are entirely feasible, and whole civilizations have been built on these foundations.

The morphology of meta patterns: the Triad of Entity-Relation-Transaction. These are fundamental categories of cognition as they are {channeled/filtered} through a (slightly) Sapir-Whorfian language grid. The presently dominating indo-European language models make ready provisions for two of the epistemological categories {Entity/State/Substance} and {Transition/Process}, while obliterating (or treating as insignificant) the possible third category of {Relation}.

The third cognitive model of relation is that of interconnectedness, and of pattern. While the first two cognitive models are fairly easy to understand for Western thinking, the third one is not. To achieve this perception, another metanoia is needed like it was demonstrated in the retracing of the awakening of the Buddha, Whitehead's society paradigm, and Macy's description of dependent causation in the model of general systems theory. The Pattern view has been described by Bateson (1979: 18) as "a pattern that connects", referring to Goethe (p.17). Bateson's definition of context (1979: 15) "as a pattern through time" is the essential platform for the present systematics of the cultural pattern.

Goppold also explains that throughout the history of philosophy, different schools of thought have weighed their world models according to these linguistic categories. In his address to the 40th Anniversary meeting of ISSS in 1996 Goppold emphasized the part-whole question and what he called "the missing ontology of relation".

Now, bridging theory and practice, I propose that the whole is not monistic or pluralistic but dynamic. The brilliance of the sustainable development policy is that it has focused on interdependence as the driving logic behind its understanding of how the world works. Interdependence is a noun that signals a state but whose meaning is a process of relating. It therefore captures the ideas of state, process and relation. In conclusion the debate to be continued is about elaborating the systemic relationship between the world view as relates to cognition, conceptions of reality, logic and languages in a perspective of the physiological need of the individual for generating knowledge about the world and in a perspective of the relationship between the I and the world.

The Relationship to Law and Governance

In the previous sections I have argued for interpreting the policy of sustainable development as an epistemic shift and hypothesized the development of such a shift into a new paradigm, on which to reconsider the fundamental concepts of self, reality and language. In my thesis I further demonstrate how this theoretical insight from the policy can be related to law and legal theory. Under the heading "From the International Law of Co-operation among Sovereign States to Law and Global Governance" I give an outline of the debates over law and legal theory under conditions of globalisation that includes the debate over unity or fragmentation between general international law and specialized regimes and over the problems of the role of law in delivering justice at a global scale. In conclusion I refer to authors who suggest to question seriously the traditional concept of positive law as applied to the global level, because it effectively does not capture the situation, which is facing us. Instead more explorative approaches are advocated, for instance, "Elements of an interactional theory of international law" (Brunnee and Toope, 2000) proposes that law might be evaluated by the influence it exerts rather than by formal tests of validity rooted in normative hierarchies, and suggests that we should stop looking for the structural distinctions that identify law and examine instead the processes that constitute a normative continuum bridging from predictable patterns of practice to legally required behavior. This approach recognizes that there is no radical discontinuity between law and non-law, and that the process of building normativity requires many of the same building blocks as other forms of social normativity. The debate further posits that communication is potentially generative of international institutions and that the central purpose of law is to facilitate communication. Such arguments naturally link any research on the role of law and the challenge of global governance tightly to ideas of deliberative democracy, communicative rationality and proceduralisation theory.

Concerning the theoretical link between law and community I examine ideas of conditions of polity building through law. I also examine Habermas' "Proceduralist Paradigm of Law" (Habermas, 1998) as a candidate for providing a theoretical framework for law and governance - linking the author and addressee of law - in a post-national world. However, the theory is critiqued as being ideal and inadequate to real life situations.

Instead, I suggest that in order to get beyond the categories formed on knowledge and a world view - we know no longer to be completely true - and create broader concepts, it is necessary to theorize the empirical material provided by practice and the conceptual machinery we apply. Therefore, I park the existing taxonomy and as a point of departure turn to the most generic definition we have of law. In its most general and comprehensive sense, law signifies a rule of action and it is applied indiscriminately to all kinds of action: whether animate or inanimate, rational or irrational. In its more confined sense law denotes the rule, not of actions in general but of human action. I propose that the first rule of human action is concerned with what constitutes the rule for reaching valid conclusions about what is. This is the *sine qua non* that human beings can act and communicate beyond the instinctual level. Therefore, we must address the question of what underlies our rule of validation for what is law and legal theory. Looking at law from this level of abstraction transcends our present distinctions, and we can explore other differentiations and new terminology that might more accurately capture today's world.

The fact of interdependence, which has been identified by sustainable development *de facto* integrate all individuals into a community of the biosphere. The question is, however, how an awareness of this fact can be translated into political identity and shared commitment. Interdependence is a fact that cannot be changed by human conduct and the political development process. It is a shared reference point common to all. Therefore, I suggest that perhaps we can understand community not as being bound by a common past but by a common future. In political philosophical terms community can be thus be conceptualized as constituted in the relational space between respect for power of agency and mutual vulnerability and enabled by a rule articulating awareness of interdependence of what is as the fundamental human conditions. Articulating and elaborating such a rule might enable integration and motivation into a political community based on and acting in accordance with the rule.

In order to connect the findings concerning the insight from sustainable development with the analysis of law and community, I first connect normativity with knowledge through the theory of change underlying sustainable development - we know we are interdependent and therefore we must act so as to protect the biosphere. In this way the policy tells us that it is the system for knowledge and not necessarily the system of values, such as freedom, social cohesion and material well being, which is a deciding field of analysis to address in order to explain legitimacy of law and integration and motivation of people into community.

The system of knowledge can be described as involving the known, the knower and the process of knowing. I propose that this system and process of knowing the human condition and the role it plays in cognition and conduct can be investigated as scientifically knowable. I further suggest that the system of knowledge can be integrated into the social sphere if understood and expressed as a set of rules including the rule of cognition, rules of orientation, rules of inference and rules of representation in language structure. These hypothesized rules are necessary to follow based on physiological need for cognition. However, the form and content of the rules can differ as demonstrated by the examples above. Thus the hypothesis is that there is a scientifically knowable machinery - consisting of the world view template created by the culturally mediated awareness of the human condition - which structures the process of processing information for action in accordance with the world view, which thus is inherent in the socially expressed communication and action. In order to make this understanding of the function of individual awareness theoretically accessible for explaining and understanding conduct

and political action I suggest that we can expand on Hart's classical concept of law (Hart, 1961). Specifically, we can conceptualize law as embedded in a horizontal cultural layer consisting of the cognitive system and expressed as a "constitution of the mind" with a set of what we can term tertiary rules outlining the constitutive limits for discourse and action. This conceptualization of the relationship between law and sustainable development - building on our system of knowledge of the human condition - opens a new field of inquiry linking meta-theory, legal culture and development of positive law and expanding the concept of law to include this layer of normativity would unfold its potential to articulate the enabling and not only the controlling function of law.

Conclusion

As indicated in this paper the potential implications of the theoretical insight which we can derive from the sustainable development policy are radical. To give effect to the world view of sustainable development as a true paradigm shift will require cooperation between all disciplines because the changes required are deeply seated in conceptions of reality, self and languages.

However in conclusion I underline first that the contribution of the sustainable development policy is that it enable us to articulate and make operational a new paradigm of the human condition. The policy provides the empirical material and the insight to conceptualize the particular field to be addressed, - it is the field of the knowledge system as based on awareness of the human condition and not the system of values, ecology, economics or any other particular field. In short the policy shows the way. Secondly, I suggest that law can provide a necessary toolbox for linking the nature with culture and the individual with community, because the connection between the known and the knower is a construction, which cannot be established from within science with its claim to objectivity and today also not from within revelation, which is perceived as subjective. Instead, if we expand the understanding of the concept of law as being embedded in a horizontal culturally mediated cognitive layer, we can give effect to the acceptance of the scientific truth and the political choice of interdependence as a vantage point from where to view a world far too complex to grasp and to the implied responsibility for individual conduct as an integral part of the human condition.

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