

A WORKBOOK AND ONLINE COMMUNITY for Co-CREATING OUR SUSTAINABILITY ETHIC

Section VI – The Curve of Hope Chapter 1 - Our Nexus Point

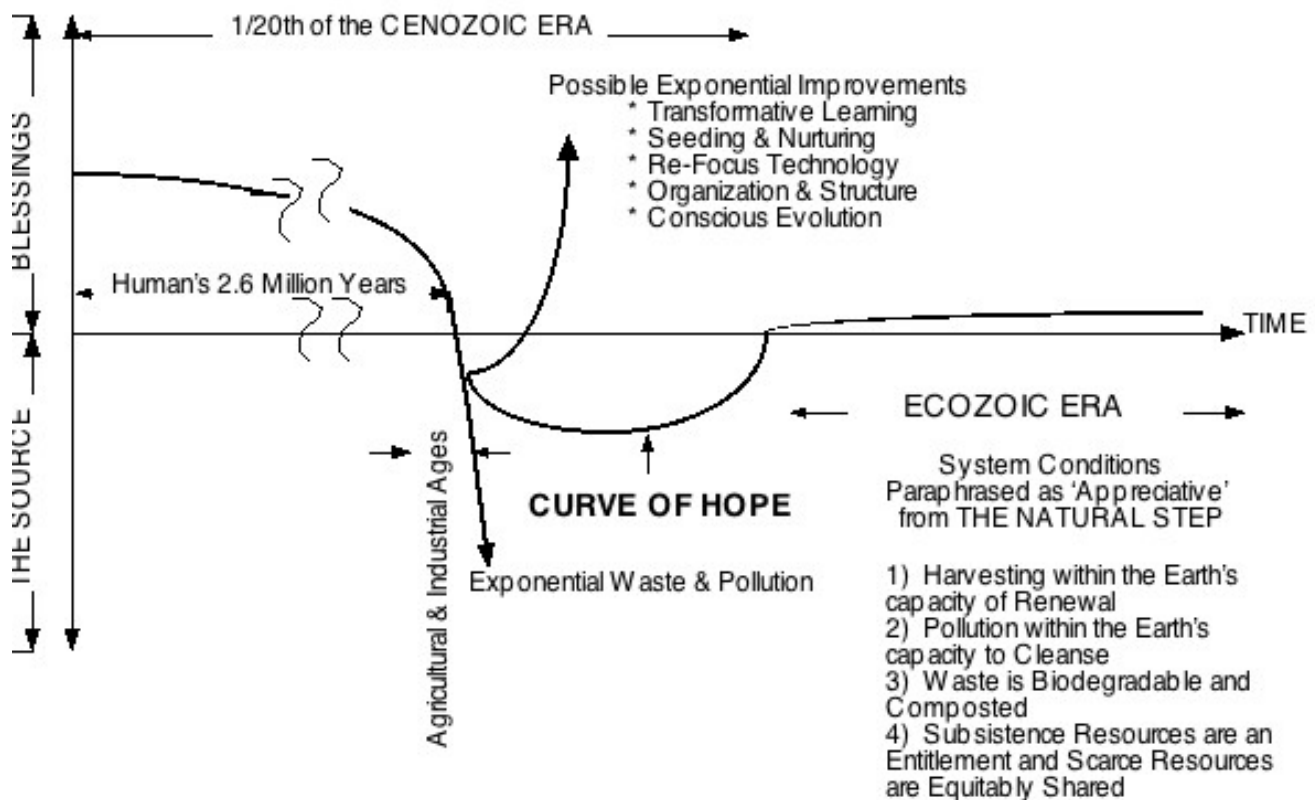
We are probably the last generation to live without acutely suffering from the irreparable damage we've done to the Earth, and the first with the intellectual and technical capacity to address it.

Allan Hammond, June 2002
Portland Illahee Lecture

How might we develop a perspective on the magnitude and urgency of the transformations necessary to achieve sustainability so that we are energized rather than paralyzed?

The following construct, 'Epochs of Sustainability: The Curve of Hope' is the basis for this Section's writing:

SUSTAINABILITY EPOCHS and 'THE CURVE OF HOPE' Milt Markewitz -- March 2004



Before looking at the details of the chart, it is important to note that the transformation on which we are focusing is the most significant in human existence – from the Cenezoic to the Ecozoic Era. Clearly new thinking, wisdom, and consciousness are in order. We are in uncharted waters, and we must apply a degree of mutuality to everything we do at an order of magnitude never before experienced. The chapters in this section offer only the most rudimentary of ideas for moving forth.

Now we are consuming more than the Earth can handle, and the 'Curve of Hope' is intended to once again bring us within the Earth's capacity.

The chart above has an x-axis that is time – from the beginning of human existence until we re-achieve living within the constraints of what our planet can support. The y-axis is separated into two halves by the x-axis. Below the x-axis we have the ‘Source’, or what might be better understood through an economic analogy as the ‘Principal’; and above the line are the ‘Blessings’ of the Earth, or in our economic analogy, the ‘Interest’ from the ‘Principal’. When the curve resides above the x-axis, it represents the unused blessings of the Earth. So you can see that for millions of years, people didn't consume or pollute at anywhere near the capacity of the Earth to replenish or cleanse. Now we are consuming more than the Earth can handle, and the 'Curve of Hope' is intended to once again bring us within the Earth's capacity.

First, let's spend a moment looking at the seriousness of our sustainability problem, symbolized by the ‘Exponential Waste and Pollution’ line. Most of us are well aware that we are in a period of mass extinction because we are destroying the system conditions (typed on the lower right hand side of the chart above) necessary for life. We know pretty much why and who's responsible. In the United States we are 6% of the Earth's population and consume 40% of the resources. And so “*We are probably the last generation to live without acutely suffering*

the irreparable damage we've done to the Earth”.

The next chapter, 'The Tragedy of the Commons', will focus on the origin and magnitude of the problem.

Clearly we are blessed to be, “*the first with the intellectual and technical capacity to address it.*” Chapter 3 of this Section, 'Exponential Improvements' will focus on counteracting the exponential vicious cycles we've created that are the basis of our 'Tragedy' with exponential virtuous cycles.

In order to overcome some of the stumbling blocks normally encountered when we try to tackle such a massive endeavor, the reader is asked to possibly suspend disbelief, and assume two new mind-sets regarding what constitutes a problem. The first is to discard the notion that the Earth and our lives are problems, but to discern them appreciatively – to assume a reverence for life and all that creates and sustains it. The second is that perhaps what we've labeled as a problem isn't a problem, but in fact a symptom. I was in a meeting recently to plan for an anti-war, specifically Iraq, rally, and a gentleman pointed out that the war wasn't the problem but the symptom. This struck a deep chord with me. War was something certain people perpetuated when they had lost their ethical compass; when power and wealth were more important than another country's sovereignty; when there wasn't a sense that life is about life and should be cherished. War is a finite game as discussed in chapter 1 of this book, and whenever the goals and objectives of a finite game overwhelm the guiding principles of the infinite game we wish to play, they are a symptom masquerading as a problem.

The chapters that follow in this section are my contribution to help organize and accelerate the work that I perceive needs doing.

Reflection

Please think about your own reaction to the nature and magnitude of our problem. Whether you knew the information presented or learned it while reading, what was your reaction?

Do you agree that we are at a nexus point?

Did you discern life as a blessing rather than a problem?

Does the construct and the chapter give you a new glimmer of hope?

Does labeling problems as symptoms of our inability to play the infinite game help you?