

Chapter VIII

IS EQUALITY SUSTAINABLE?

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ABSTRACT

Sustainable habitable environments are sorely needed, as we contrast the dire contemporary situation with the great traditional societies of the past, which sustained a high degree of cultural sophistication for long periods. These were in general structured hierarchically, and were not characterized by equality.

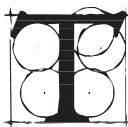
The idea of equality is fairly recent and characteristic of the machine age. The political thrust towards equality has now become obsessive. Equality does not generate an equitable society, but forcibly imposes a false ideal structure onto a diverse natural order. A society of equality may not be sustainable, as complex systems require hierarchical structuring, which appears to be natural.

Sociopolitical consciousness has become totalitarian in imposing a singular view of the world. In Jungian terms this is indicative of a collective repression, where

unacceptable contents of the unconscious are denied, attain psychic charge, are projected onto others as scapegoats, and later erupt into consciousness with devastating effects.

Political consciousness is binary in nature, providing an ultimatum: conform or be condemned. Inherent in this is a loss of higher consciousness. Confronted with totalitarian forces in the collective psyche, a transcendent mode of being is required, characterized by the triadic logic of non-dualism.

Equality is not sustainable in my opinion. The way towards equitable sustainability may rather be that of traditional wisdom, which does not impose an artificial structure of equality, but rather realizes the natural harmony pervading the Cosmos.

 HE NEED FOR A SUSTAINABLE HABITABLE environment is becoming more recognized,¹ as we contrast the environmental degradation and societal breakdown that characterizes contemporary society with the great traditional societies of the past. Many of these sustained a high degree of spiritual, aesthetic and intellectual sophistication - associated with a modest material standard of living - for periods of a thousand years or more.² These traditional societies were in general structured hierarchically, with spiritual authority balancing temporal power, as Coomaraswamy clearly demonstrates.³ They certainly were not characterized by equality *per se*, and the contemporary Western mind has developed an abhorrence of what it presumes to be inequitable relationships of power and privilege such as those of vassal and serf.⁴

But the very notion of "equality" is I suggest of rather recent origin: it is an idea, nothing more, with its own history. It has much to do with the machine aesthetic of the industrial revolution; and has permeated the scientific world-view from the time of Descartes. It is indicative of what René Guénon terms a loss of metaphysical quality in a quantitative age.⁵

I argue that the political thrust towards equality has now become obsessive and extreme. It does not in fact lead to an equitable society, but an ersatz egalitarianism

where the natural order is violently suppressed in the demand that it conform to an idealistic structure. As such, its antecedents might be traced back through Christianity to Platonic Idealism, in the sense of the conceiving of an ideal which is then implemented or realized in the material realm. But Plato shows clearly in the *Republic* that the State characterized by excessive democratization is an abhorrence and discriminates against natural harmony and justice.

I further argue that a society characterized by equality is not sustainable. It is elsewhere suggested that complexity above a certain level requires hierarchical structuring, which appears to be natural.⁶ So a society of equality is inherently unstable, and indicative of a breakdown of the rich order of life into a morbid state of dynamic death. Change is still happening as the motor continues to turn over, but it is mere physical transformation without the blessings of higher consciousness that characterize the spiritual life which makes us human.

It is becoming more evident that we inhabit not just a physical, but also a psychic and a spiritual environment;⁷ and it is critical that we take full cognizance of these interrelated realities of our being. But in my opinion, what I term "political consciousness" - a mind-set that sees the world as being predominantly the sociopolitical milieu,⁸

with reality as a social construction - has become totalitarian in nature. It seeks to impose an ideal and singular view onto the world. It envisages an ideal society, with ideal people, characterized by an ideal state of equality. But it engenders what I term institutional violence.

To achieve those ideal ends, it finds it necessary to ruthlessly suppress any evidence of natural variation in what is essentially a scorched earth policy. Carl Jung has drawn attention to the mechanism of repression whereby the ego-consciousness seeks to deny its shadow, the unconscious.⁹ In the West, this denial of the "other" stems in part from 2000 years of Christianity, which has become one-sided by an excessive identification with the good, the true and the beautiful, and presuming to ignore or to deny what appears as the bad, the untrue and the ugly.

But Jung points out we are both; contents of the unconsciousness which are denied attain a psychic charge, are projected onto others, and later erupt into consciousness with sometimes devastating results. We need rather, in effect, to love and come to know and accept our dark side, in order to become fully integrated in the essential individuation process.

It is apparent to me that the political movement towards equality is a form of denial of one's own shadow. Diversity and natural richness have, as it were, become too threatening to the contemporary mind. Factors which one finds unacceptable in the depths of one's own psyche (whether personal or collective), are projected onto others - specifically those who do not unquestioningly accept and wholeheartedly endorse the imposition of the ideal society upon themselves and upon others. In other words what has been a laudable intent - to liberate those who are bound in oppressive conditions - has now become totalitarian. If one does not enthusiastically respond to the political pressure for change, one is pigeonholed as a reactionary, an obstacle, the source of society's discontent - and made a scapegoat.

So the political consciousness with which we are confronted is especially binary in nature. Energetic interchanges are characterized by one party providing an ultimatum: either conform to my directives as to how you should be, and be then accepted as part of the collective; or deny my will, and be then excluded and denigrated. It is the structure of intolerance.

Inherent in this is a loss of higher consciousness. The subtle appreciation that things are seldom what they seem, that there are mysterious depths to configurations of consciousness and existence, that paradoxically to be wrong may be right though at a deeper level of being; this subtle appreciation is condemned and rode roughshod over in the attempt to destroy any opposition to the ideal, the "master plan".

What may perhaps be needed, in order to avoid being locked into such totalitarian dualism, is a transcendent mode of operation which, encountering a binary opposition of action and reaction, seeks to integrate the dialectic into a higher mode of realization.¹⁰ Thus while totalitarianism is characterized by binary opposition - conform or stand condemned - a transcendent society is characterized by the triadic logic of non-dualism. For, *Thou art, ever beyond the play of opposites*: such oppositions serve merely to enable in the prepared mind transcendence of the earthly realm of suffering.

Therefore, I suggest equality is not sustainable. An equitable society might rather be approached through the traditional wisdom that informs the *philosophia perennis*. Equitable sustainability is realized through the rich diversity of power, possession and privilege which characterized the great traditional civilizations of the past. Lightly held, traditional structures enable the flow of Grace and flowering of wisdom; they provide the transcendental means for the individual to realize his essential identification with the source of all being.

In the movement towards equitable sustainability, what may perhaps be indicated is not the imposition of an artificial structure of equality, but the realization of the natural structure of diversity. This is simply natural harmony, which pervades the Cosmos.¹¹

1 See the Preface to my *Radical Tradition*.

2 Megalithic societies of Great Britain constructed long barrows and used them as sepulchral monuments continuously for a period of a thousand years, at the end of which time they were ritually sealed.

3 A.K. Coomaraswamy, *Spiritual Authority and Temporal Power in the Indian Theory of Government*. Munshiram Manoharlal, New Delhi, 1978.

4 But as the great Tibetan guru Padma Sambhava teaches "as a thing is viewed, so it appears..." See W.Y. Evans-Wentz, ed.,

The Tibetan Book of the Great Liberation - or the Method of Realizing Nirvana through Knowing the Mind. Oxford University Press, London, 1954.

5 See René Guénon, *The Crisis of the Modern World*. Luzac and Company, London, 1975.

6 See my "In Praise of the Hierarchy...?" *Radical Tradition*, op.cit., Ch. VI; also Lancelot Law Wye, Albert G. Wilson & Donna Wilson, eds., *Hierarchical Structures*. American Elsevier, New York, 1969.

7 See my "The Place of the Sacred in the Home", *Radical Tradition*, op. cit., Ch. I.

Also my *The Integral Space Habitation*.

8 Derived in part from the work of Karl Marx, and more recently from Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckman, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*. Penguin Books, Middlesex, 1956.

9 See in particular C.G. Jung, *The Undiscovered Self*. A Mentor Book, New York, 1957.

10 What is needed is what the great Tibetan teacher sGam.po.pa describes as *the perfection of discriminating awareness born from wisdom, which perfection makes us see Reality as it is*. See sGam.po.pa, *The Jewel Ornament of Liberation*. Trans. & Annot. by Herbert V. Guenther, Prajna Press, Boulder, 1981.

11 Natural Harmony is approached through Sacred Geometry and the Philosophy of Sacred Art and Architecture in my *The Aesthetics of the Sacred*.