



After Sustainability

The Necessity of Virtuous Citizens



Introduction

With the threats of climate change, ecological destruction and widespread pollution, the importance of adopting greater sustainability measures has never been greater. Yet, due to sustainability's ideological nature, it requires both social adoption and individual action as a condition of its implementation – a task which continues to be threatened and undermined by neoliberalism influences. As such, the best way to implement sustainability and offset the corrosive effects of market forces, is to cultivate virtuous citizens and advance moral responsibility.

Markets

The forces of capitalism, consumerism, and competition, have hindered the ability of individuals to make rational choices and take moral action.

Part I - The market system has led to environmental degradation, resource exhaustion and mass extinctions. These results are due to the system's three fundamental principles of growth, technology and consumption

Part II - The present capitalist economic system has become the primary source of our fundamental beliefs and value system.

Part III - Society's hierarchies are determined by wealth, which leads people to focus their lives on the pursuit and acquisition of capital. This pursuit has increased amoral behaviour and public corruption; and as private capital grew, social capital has dwindled.

The extension of market forces into every aspect of human and social life have blurred the lines between market reasoning and moral reasoning (the market economy has given way to a market society).

Morals

From a moral perspective, the problem with the market system is two-fold: its emphasis on acute self-interest and self-deception.

Part I - What is needed is a worldview that emphasizes relationships, integration, holism and connectivity. This can only be achieved by a worldview that allows people to re-exam who they are, why they are here, and how they are connected to the world.

Part II - Aristotelean virtue ethics provides the ideal framework to base such a worldview, and to live and flourish within a sustainable world.

(1) The economic, social, and ecological crises alluded to in the markets section, are also existential and moral crises.

(2) Within a virtual ethics framework, sustainability would be seen as a means to achieve human excellence, rather than a set of burdensome restrictions or annoying regulations.

(3) Since sustainability requirements are often place-based, and context-specific, virtue ethic's fluidity provides an ideal framework to address sustainability's myriad of issues.

(4) Virtue ethics' use and promotion of practical wisdom is critical when it comes to assessing and making judgements on the various complex problems that can arise with sustainability.

Conclusion

Effective moral action will depend on individuals exerting their virtues, human rights, and civic responsibilities, to push back neoliberal forces and to reacquire their moral capital, rebuild healthy communities, and safeguard their natural environments.

