

Towards Attaining a Sustainable Community

Aomori Public College

Dennis U. Okamoto

Key Words: instinct, intelligence, wisdom, community, earthism

Abstract

Utilizing Alfred Whitehead's process philosophy of *Instinct, Intelligence and Wisdom* as a foundation, I will present a proposed model of a sustainable agricultural community. In addition to the previously mentioned concepts, *Foresight and Wisdom* are absolutely essential. Also, the philosophy of John B. Cobb Jr. and Herman Daly will be employed, specifically, the concept of *earthism* espoused by John B. Cobb Jr. Implicit within this model is the thought not only of a commercial entity, but considerations for family, neighbours and the natural environment to obtain, maintain and further community sustainability. To accomplish this, individuals must be able to acquire satisfaction and energy from the realization that the community, not primarily the individual, will benefit. In other words pure individualism is not the primary objective, but cooperation, mutual satisfaction and success is the ultimate goal. To accomplish the aforementioned, a philosophic undertone must exist and be exemplified.

Introduction

My presentation will utilize Alfred Whitehead's process philosophy as a foundation and John B. Cobb's philosophy related to the attainment and continuation of a sustainable community. Utilizing the knowledge and wisdom of the two mentioned scholars, I will present a proposed example of such a community in Aomori, Japan. The process philosophy of *Instinct, Intelligence and Wisdom* will be discussed along with the essential concepts of *Foresight* and *Wisdom*. Also, the concept of *earthism* stated by John Cobb will be employed. Implicit within this model is the assertion not only of a commercial entity, but considerations for family, neighbors and the natural environment to obtain, maintain and further community sustainability.

Whitehead's Philosophy Related to Sustainable Communities

The following paragraphs will draw materials from Alfred Whitehead's philosophy. "There is the one all-embracing fact which is the advancing history of the Universe. This community of the world, which is the matrix of all begetting, and whose essence is process with retention of connectedness defines community." (Whitehead, 1933, p. 192). Whitehead philosophy emphasizes process and internal relations instead of substances and their external relations. Internal relates to the inter-relationship between and among people, which leads to *a person in community* (Cobb, 2007). The important aspect is the internal relationship and cooperation within a group. Communities consist of a group of people that are held together by internal relations, however in order to transcend to interactions among communities, they must incorporate openness as a primary necessity for interaction. External relates to what Professor Cobb refers to as the widely individualistic and substantialist model of *homo economicus* (Cobb, 2007). Most decisions in business are communicated through constant realities expressed in this concept. According to Whitehead, *External Relations* means that things can be thought of in its own exclusive condition. An entity can be comprehensible apart from any other such entity. It can exist by itself. However, in the practical world entering into relationships with others is a necessity (Whitehead, 1933, p. 144). *External Relations* exist only for

itself and therefore leads to the individualistic and largely supported model of the economic man. To persist and flourish, communities need formal organizations, but they should be in the service of the community. To understand social institutions, a three-fold division of human nature is required, that is *Instinct, Intelligence and Wisdom*. "Instinct is presupposed in consciousness and is the mode of experience directly arising out of the urge of inheritance, individual and environmental. Intelligence is the intellectual operations consisting of the coordination of notions derived from the primary facts of instinctive experience into a logically coherent system. Wisdom is the decision which determines the mode of coalescence of instinct with intelligence" (Whitehead, 1933, pp. 58 -60). But this separation must not be made too distinctly. The aforementioned describes the process of *Instinct, Intelligence and Wisdom*.

Since communities are made up of individuals, it is natural that for self-satisfaction individuals have freedom. However, this freedom must be tempered with the primary objective being that of the community. One general goal is that these groups contribute to the intricate shape of community life, expressing its own features. Through this, individuality obtains the fruitfulness issuing from cooperation and freedom obtains authority necessary for its exquisiteness (Whitehead, 1933, p. 86). This freedom must be coordinated to create harmony within the group, which Whitehead terms *Persuasion*. Persuasion is an art, which delicately reconciles thoughts in the direction that is favored. One kind of compulsion that communities struggle with is the coordination of social activities. This is accomplished by impulse, partially by pressure from other members and partially by reasonable persuasion. As the area of reasonable persuasion widens, a setting has been provided within which intelligence and delicate feelings can attain their use and enjoyment (Whitehead, 1933, p. 87). At times it may become necessary to employ a *Persuasive Agency* to reconcile differences among individuals within the community. (Whitehead, 1933 pp. 213-216). This medium is a knowledgeable third party who can negotiate such that harmony is restored. Subsequent to persuasion, it is desirable that the third party is no longer necessary. Thus, the role of the third party should occur normally or

voluntarily within the context of issues involved between and among individuals within the community.

For any community to be sustainable, members within it should have *Foresight*. In order to have *Foresight*, there should be placed sufficient importance upon pertinent actualities from which future events will occur. A concise and exact precept of *Foresight* is not possible. What can be accomplished, however, is to narrow the focus to a profession and express the mentality necessary for the accomplishment of *Foresight* in that area (Whitehead, 1933, p. 111). *Foresight* is based on the mode of understanding. Related to actual activities it is a habit. However, this habit is exacted by another, understanding. Largely, understanding can be obtained through cognizant endeavor and can be learned through training. *Foresight* is an outcome of *Insight* (Whitehead, 1933, p. 113). *Insight* is the ability to perceive clearly, deeply and penetratingly. Whitehead states that the initiation of *Wisdom* is the understanding that social life is based on routine. "Routine is a product of conditioned reflex according to current *physiological phraseology* (Whitehead, 1933, p. 114)." It is a necessity for the survival of a community. *Foresight* assumes stableness in a group and stability is the result of routine. An arrangement will be the result of intelligence, but when the routine is automatic, intelligence disappears and the arrangement can continue through the collaboration of conditioned reflexes. The result is that *Foresight* disappears, but the continuation of the routine will be successful. However, routine has limitations and the perception that these limitations affect future actions brings forth the realization that foresight is necessary (Whitehead, 1933, p. 114).

In relation to the process of *Instinct, Intelligence and Wisdom*, habit may be the *Instinct* of community and *Intellect* may relate the community to the world. *Foresight* may occur from *Intellect*, and *Persuasion* may be derived from *Wisdom*. *Persuasion* is not only related to others, but also to oneself, which may be the community itself. Through the change in *Instinct* brought about by *Persuasion*, community may undergo development leading to its sustainability. Underlying

Whitehead's philosophy is that at the foundation of humans, community and the world is the all-powerful love of God, which allows the process to exist and flourish.

John B. Cobb's Philosophy Related to Sustainable Communities

According to John Cobb & Herman Daly for a collection of people to have a communal character, four requirements are necessary. They are self-identification, extensive participation in decisions, group responsibility for its members and respect for the individuality of its members. (Daly & Cobb, 1994, p. 172).

Sustainable development and sustainable community are definitely not complementary; indeed they are contrary to each other. The dominant model of development as growth requires an attack on current communities as well as changing traditional values. Development here means that individuals subordinate their concerns for communities to gain more goods for themselves. Spiritual values are subordinated to material ones (Cobb, 1994, pp. 56, 57).

In modern economic theory, human relationships are secondary to increased production and consumption. (Cobb, 1994, p. 57). Community development returns to the traditional view that the economy should be in the service of the community and that development derives from the values of the community and this development strengthens the community as community (Cobb, 1994, p.57).

Community development enables villages to become more self-reliant. This requires that in essential matters communities are able to provide some of these, but this does not mean complete self-sufficiency. Community development moves towards self-sufficiency in essentials, but due to the atmosphere of sharing which goes beyond one group, communities should be able to rely upon each other. This dependence should strengthen the bonds among communities. Even development of this nature may sometimes increase the use of scarce materials, but the solution may be to develop more sustainable and efficient practices (Cobb, 1994, p. 58).

Orthodox growth-oriented development sees traditional rural communities as inefficient producers of agricultural goods to be replaced by agribusiness. Community development, at least in much of the world, sees the most important matter as strengthening agricultural communities.

Communities to be sustainable, must exist in harmony with the natural environment. Without this objective, people may not be motivated to take the necessary actions for their own survival. People concerned only for their own well-being will inevitably take too narrow a view of what is required to assure that survival (Cobb, 1994, p. 66).

Earthism, the terminology used by Cobb, calls not merely for sustainable human communities but the commitment to the subsistence of the wider ecological communities. (Cobb, 1994, p. 67). When the philosophy of *earthism* exists, communities can rely upon each other to adequately supply the bare essentials for survival. Inherent within the concept of *earthism* is the philosophy of communities of communities.

A Proposed Example of a Sustainable Community

With this in mind, I will propose a structure that fosters communities and pursues continuous sustainability with correspondent importance placed upon the environment by intertwining Alfred Whitehead's concept of *Instinct, Intelligence, and Wisdom* into my model. My model opposes the current and dominant growth-oriented thought that family farms are inefficient and should be completely replaced by agribusiness. Large farms have its place, but the primary base especially in Japan should be the family farm. From my thirty years of experience in the agricultural environment, large, independent farms do not create an environment of mutual cooperation and existence. There exists the all-powerful motivation of pure self-interest. The structure I propose is for local areas in Aomori City to form groups and coordinate with local cooperatives to perform all of the activities from production to marketing. The group will include a number of family farms consisting on average 1 - 2 hectares and the local cooperatives. This has been the traditional method of operation and is a prime example of what Whitehead calls *Instinct*. This type of farm operation incorporates factors

absorbed from ancestors, individual actions and is environmentally friendly. Environment here relates not only to the natural environment, but to the interaction among farmers within and outside the group. The numerous decisions that individual operators will have to make related to planning, production, financing, marketing requires the use of instinctive experience, knowledge and utilizing past, current, future information, coordinating this into a viable program for each year. This is an example of *Intelligence*. The decision which merges these factors is an example of *Wisdom*. My thought is that in addition to *Wisdom*, *Foresight* derived from *Intellect* is essential. The agricultural operators must be able to predict future changes in the business environment. This process exemplifies Whitehead process philosophy. The MAFF (Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fishery) has indicated that a collective farm must have 20 hectares or more to comply with the new payment regulations, so forming a group would accomplish this since each individual farm consists on average about 1 - 2 hectares (MAFF, 2007). Since the farms are small, almost all of the activities are accomplished through hand labor, which is environmentally friendly. As with any group, there will emerge minor dissension concerning certain decisions made by the entire group, but if there is a farm manager with farm management skills these problems can be resolved. However, at time, there may be a need for a *Persuasive Agency*. (Whitehead, 1933). A knowledgeable third party may be necessary to reconcile differences between individuals to resolve issues and advise actions in a manner, which will be accepted by parties involved. Subsequent to persuasion, it is desirable that the third party is no longer necessary. Thus, the role of the third party should occur naturally or voluntarily within the context of the issues involved. Consolidation into a larger group will allow it to purchase input materials, produce and market a sizable quantity of produce giving it strengthen in bargaining for lower prices of input materials and higher prices for their products. Also, if there is a necessity for facilities to add value to raw products, this can also be accomplished with assistance from MAFF. The options that are available are accomplishing this through private companies or utilizing the local farmer's cooperatives. A problem that has to be reconciled is the marketing of produce. Since farmers are not

experts in marketing, the option of utilizing the local agricultural cooperatives, which has a nationwide network, is a viable solution. However, they have become inefficient and ineffective and must therefore drastically improve their practices.

It will be necessary for farmers and cooperatives to encompass what Alfred Whitehead calls the *Business Mind*. He states that, "But to obtain the requisite foresight, the result of education will be a philosophic power of understanding the complexity of human societies which is necessary. Such instinctive grasp of human society is of absolute importance" (Whitehead, 1933). In other words, within the practice of farming and agricultural management a philosophic undertone is essential for success. Broad views and outcomes must be envisioned when making crucial decisions in every phase of this profession.

Reference

Cobb, J. B. Jr. (1994). *Sustaining the Common Good*, Cleveland, Ohio: The Pilgrim Press.

Cobb, J. B. Jr. (2007). *Person-In-Community: Whiteheadian Insights into Community and Institutions*, Retrieved June 10, 2008 from <http://oss.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract>.

Daly, H. E. & Cobb, J. B. Jr. (1994). *For The Common Good*, Boston, Massachusetts: Beacon Press.

Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries. (2007) *Annual Report on Food, Agriculture and Rural Areas in Japan FY 2007*. Retrieved Nov. 1, 2007 from MAFF homepage: <http://www.maff.go.jp/eindexhtml>.

Whitehead, A.N. (1933). *Adventures Of Ideas*, New York: The Macmillan Company.