

Laszlo Zsolnai
Business Ethics Center,
Corvinus University of Budapest
and
Future Earth Finance & Economics Knowledge-Action Network
Montreal

Business Ethics for the Anthropocene

Technical University of Munich
May 29, 2017

Central Propositions

- (1) The currently unsustainable state of the Earth is largely due to the activities of business, so reconsidering the role of business in society and nature is unavoidable.**
- (2) Without transforming business into a progressive social institution, which respects nature, future generations and the common good of society there is no chance of creating a sustainable Earth.**

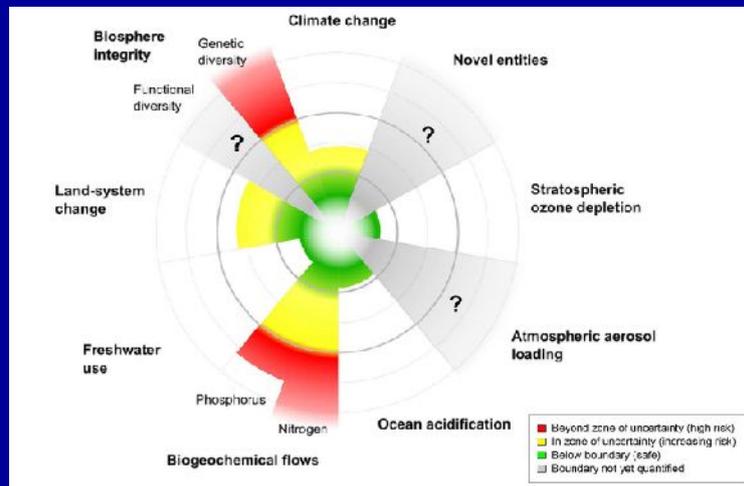
The Anthropocene

Humankind is altering the biogeochemistry of the planet itself, destabilizing climate and influencing co-evolution at the planetary level.



- **Earth System trends have been convergently deteriorating since the 1950s.**
- **Human perturbation levels of three of the Earth system processes/features overcome the planetary boundaries, that is, the safe operating space for humanity.**

Planetary Boundaries



Source: Steffen et al. (2015)

The Principle of Responsibility

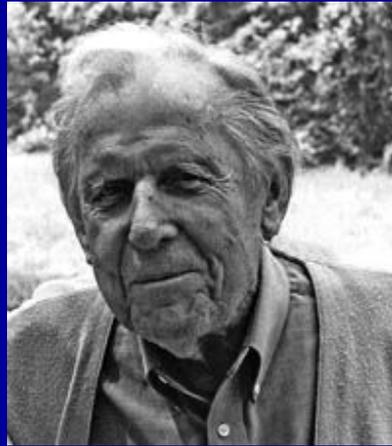


“Act so that the **effects** of your **action** are compatible with the **permanence** of genuine **human life**”.

Hans Jonas
(1903-1993)

Thomas Berry, C.P.

„From here on, the **primary judgement** of all human **institutions, professions, and programs** and **activities** will be determined by the extent to which they **inhabit, ignore** or **foster** a mutually **enhancing human-Earth relationship.**”



The responsibility of business

Business is the **most powerful player** in the Anthropocene and is mainly **responsible** for the degrading state of the biosphere in the last 50-60 years. **Business related activities** including **material consumption** caused most of the **negative effects** in the biosphere.

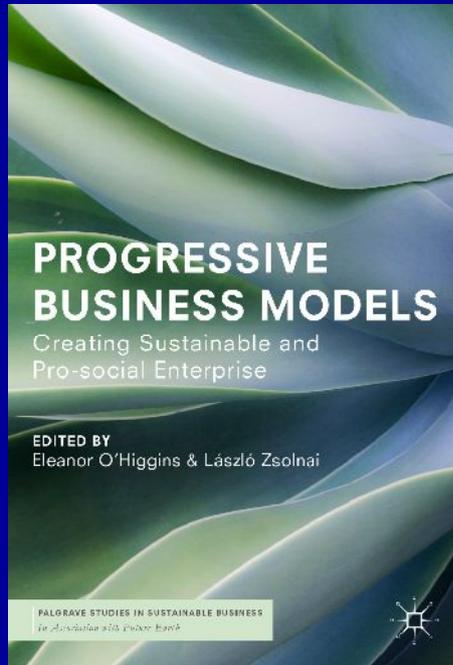
The importance of business models

The key problem is the form and scale of business operations. The business models of today's **mainstream business do not fit** in the reality of the **biosphere**.

Business models vary but almost none of them are consistent with the **flourishing of life on Earth** (including human and non-human, and future life).

Reinventing business

To achieve meaningful change in the humanity-nature nexus we have to **reinvent** the way **business functions** today. How can business become ecologically conscious agent which operates within limits, that is, uses only its **“fair earth share”** and contributes to the richness of life on Earth?



**Progressive business is ecological,
future respecting and pro-social.**

- (1) Business does not harm nature or allow others to come to harm,**
- (2) Business does not violate the interest of future generations,**
- (3) Business serves enabling people.**

Progressive Business (1)

Ethical banking



Triodos  **Bank**

Make your money make a difference

Progressive Business (2)



customer owned
wind power
production



Progressive Business (3)



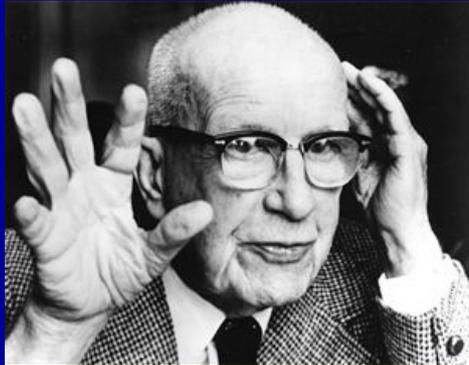
Paul Polman
The Green CEO

The Commonwealth of Life

Humans are **members** of, not masters over, **life's commonwealth**. It is the **flourishing of life** (human and non-human, present and future) that matters.

Earth's limited capacity to construct and maintain far from equilibrium systems implies **limits to legitimate human appropriation** of nature (energy and sinks).

R. Buckminster Fuller



You **never** change things by **fighting** the **existing reality**. To change something, build a **new model** that makes the **existing model obsolete**.

Thank you!