

**Creating and Solving ‘the World’s Most Unsustainable Development’:
Government’s Role(s) in the Oil Sands Developments**

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Introduction:

A number of commentators consider the problems generated by the Alberta’s tar sands¹ developments to be so serious that they call it ‘the world’s most unsustainable development.’ How could we have let this happen? In particular, how could democratically elected governments, on both the provincial and national level, allow this situation to develop in our country? What understanding(s) of the government’s role contributed to this situation?

In order to explore these questions, we need to address another, still deeper question, namely, *how can we explain why these understandings of governments’ role were actually used to direct government in dealing with the oil sands development while the emergence of many, growing and intractable problems were effectively ignored or postponed by government? How can we explain why governments did act on some problems, while not dealing with a range of other intense problems that were emerging?*

There are a variety of explanations in the literature for why governments adopt the roles they do, from liberal pluralist to neo-Marxist to post-modern. The thrust of this paper is to present and explore an additional explanation, one that has not received the attention it deserves. It warrants a

¹ Not surprisingly, the terms *tar sands* and *oil sands* have taken on strong rhetorical and ideological characteristics in popular and scholarly literature. In fact, the material extracted is neither oil nor tar, but *bitumen*. In order to leave ourselves open to “hearing” arguments from all corners, and to not prematurely shut down dialogue, I propose to use the terms interchangeably in discussion.

closer look, I believe, because it shows promise to help understand the nature and direction of the tar sands developments, to make sense of the roles government plays in these developments, and particularly, to craft solutions to growing contemporary problems. Proposed Bob Goudzwaard, a Dutch economist and philosopher, this explanation suggests that the various understandings of the role of government common in our society, although differing on significant issues, were inspired commonly by a faith in progress, that is, the deep confidence that ever advancing human happiness can be secured through increased scientific understanding, greater technological mastery of nature, and continuous economic growth. I explore this particular explanation because I find it helpful for understanding why particular roles of government were used in the ways they were in the development of the tar sands.

This paper is organized into four steps. First, using a series of typologies, I briefly survey the key understandings of the government's role that historically contributed to the development of the tar sands, along with examples. Second, even more briefly, I mention several key theoretical explanations for why these particular views of government were adopted by governing authorities, to set the stage. Third, I introduce Goudzwaard's explanation for why particular competing view(s) of government were adopted in the late 19th and 20th century industrialized Europe and North America, and briefly suggest how this explanation illuminates the oil sands developments. Fourth, I introduce and outline his alternative, care-based understanding of development, and the state's role, and show how these insights might apply to, and assist, the design of contemporary government actions on the tar sands. I argue that this approach offers some promising ways to re-conceptualize the preventative care [pre-care] and [post-care] restoration roles of government relative to the environmental, social and economic sides of resource development.

The World's Most Unsustainable Development: why so little government action?

Dr. David W. Schindler, a world-renown Professor of Ecology, (University of Alberta), said of the tar sands: "I would nominate this for the world's most unsustainable development."² Indeed, in recent years, a range of critical economic, social and environmental problems and weaknesses have resulted from, or been associated with, the oil sands developments.

For purposes of illustration, on the economic front, problems have emerged such as labour shortages, recognition of the credentials of foreign workers, rapidly rising costs of living, setting of appropriate resource royalty rates, the problem of rapidly inflating capital-infrastructure costs, retaining economic benefits and spin-offs in Canada, inefficient use of clean natural gas, and many more. Social problems related to the tar sands include: participation of aboriginal nations in development, dealing with a continuing and sometimes enlarging gap between rich and poor, low salaries for NGO social agency staff, increases in sexually transmitted diseases, drug, alcohol and gambling addictions in remote work camps, and so on. Environmental issues include, increased levels of acid rain, air pollution, GHG emissions, the destruction and loss of land and ecology, water shortages and pollution, cleaning up toxic tailings ponds, etc.

A host of other complicated problems suggesting the current developments are unsustainable have been identified in the literature: such as, using clean natural gas fuel to produce a dirty form of energy from bitumen; the high levels of energy inputs required to produce another form of energy that is suited for transportation fuel; major problems with industrial water use and disposal, as new mines and plants come on stream; or suggestions we should use nuclear power plants to produce **energy** that would simply be used to extract other **energy** in the form of fossil fuels [thus, using the potentially troublesome energy source of nuclear power—with its serious waste-disposal problems—to extract and process oil sands energy, with its own harmful side effects, extreme costs, and long term issues]. My

² David W. Schindler, "Environmental Effects of Alberta's Current Boom," keynote speech, October 23, 2007 at "Alberta: Living the Boom and Bust," a conference at the University of Alberta, Augustana Campus.

point here is not to exhaustively repeat the case that current oil sands developments are producing massive problems and using many unsustainable practices. This case can be explored in various sources, including excellent books on these questions, such as, Andrew Nikiforuk, *Tar Sands*,³ Tony Clarke, *Tar Sands Showdown*,⁴ and other more general energy studies.⁵ Furthermore, a wealth of information and data on practices, problems and issues in the tar sands is readily available in the wide range of reports and studies produced by think tanks and research institutes.⁶

My question is: how can we explain why Albertan and Canadian governments engaged in the range of roles in oil sands development which history shows they did, but they did not choose to deal with—preventatively or otherwise—the growing range of intense problems known to be generated by these developments? I'll briefly explore one example, the problem of the production of massive toxic tailings ponds. Early on in the process of discovering and improving the most common bitumen extraction process, both provincial and federal governments knew that this process would produce huge toxic tailings ponds.⁷ But, these governments allowed, and even encouraged and financed, this development! There seemed to have been a prevalent expectation that science and technology would solve this problem.

Today, some say a “light is appearing at the end of the tunnel” as expensive solutions are being tested and attempted. In the meantime, government has allowed these toxic tailings ponds to grow to the point where there are now a total of 80 square kilometres of ponds, and some pose incredible risks. They contain water, bitumen residue, heavy metals, and clay. After 30 years of industrial development, and almost 90 years of scientific research,⁸ we are still not sure how to practically, and in a cost-effective manner, make the toxins and suspended particles settle properly. This problem has grown to the point where the second largest dam in the world now sits just north of Fort McMurray holding back one of Syncrude's toxic tailing ponds. Yet, we continue to rush ahead in exploiting the tar sands and governments allow new open pit mines to join in. Recently, *National Geographic* reported:

In the oldest and most notorious [tailing pond], Suncor's Pond 1, the sludge is perched high above the river, held back by a dike of compacted sand that rises more than 300 feet from the valley floor and is studded with pine trees. The dike has leaked in the past, and in 2007 a modeling study done by hydrogeologists at the University of Waterloo estimated that 45,000 gallons a day of contaminated water could be reaching the river. Suncor is now in the process of reclaiming Pond 1, piping some tailings to another pond, and replacing them with gypsum to consolidate the tailings. By 2010, the company says, the surface will be solid enough to plant trees on. Last summer it was still a blot of beige mud streaked with black bitumen and dotted with orange plastic scarecrows that are supposed to dissuade birds from landing and killing themselves.⁹

³ Andrew Nikiforuk, *Tar Sands: Dirty Oil and the Future of a Continent*, Greystone Books, September 2008.

⁴ Tony Clarke, *Tar Sands Showdown: Canada and the New Politics of Oil in an Age of Climate Change*, Toronto: James Lorimer, 2008.

⁵ William Marsden, *Stupid to the Last Drop: How Alberta Is Bringing Environmental Armageddon to Canada (and doesn't seem to care)*; Mark Jaccard, *Sustainable Fossil Fuels: An Unusual Suspect in the Quest for Clean and Enduring Energy*, Cambridge University Press, 2005; and Mark Jaccard, *Hot Air: Meeting Canada's Climate Change Challenge*, 2007. McClelland and Stewart.

⁶ See Pembina Institute, accessed May 1, 2009 at <http://www.pembina.org/>; KAIROS, accessed May 1, 2009 at <http://www.kairoscanada.org/en/get-involved/campaign/>; Parkland Institute, accessed May 1, 2009 at <http://www.ualberta.ca/PARKLAND/research/studies/index.html>; Polaris Institute, accessed May 1, 2009 at <http://www.polarisinstitute.org/energy/>; and many others.

⁷ Paul Chastko, *Developing Alberta's Oil sands*, chapter 1.

⁸ Paul Chastko, *Developing Alberta's Oil sands*, chapter 1.

⁹ Robert Kunzig, “The Canadian Oil Boom” *National Geographic*, March, 2009.

Modernist approach to analysis contributes to tar sands problems

This paper on government's role in the oil sands is part of my larger research project. The arguments I make here build on arguments made in an earlier (2008 CPSA) paper "Hypnotized by Progress: Does the Modernist Approach to Social Science Obscure the Central Thrust of the Oil Sands Developments?" This earlier paper explored how the approaches to doing science have shaped the ways we exploit the oil sands and contribute to the vast and devastating litany of problems and issues mentioned above. In order to explore the government's role in oil sands development, I briefly summarize how the dominant modernist approach to science seriously distorts our understanding of the oil sands developments and thus contributes to how government sees, and acts on, the oil sands.

In reading a vast array of studies on a wide range of aspects of the tar sands developments—conducted by corporations, think tanks, government departments, NGOs, consultants, and academic scholars—I found a great deal of interesting and helpful information and, of course, learned a great deal. When these studies are taken in the aggregate, however, they produce a troublesome pattern—few seem to tackle the 'central thrust' of the oil sands developments. Many use what I will refer to as the *modernist approach to social science*, or often described as the "naturalism-empiricism-positivism tradition."¹⁰ This widely used approach recommends we undertake a "*journey of investigation*" that disaggregates or splits up the phenomena studied into disciplinary, sub-disciplinary, and/or interest-group elements. Academics, for example, are directed by this approach to focus on problems within their disciplinary sub-disciplinary expertise¹¹—water issues, labour shortages, housing and rental problems, GHG emissions, tailings ponds reclamation, infrastructure shortages, governance issues, or other focused problems. Policy institute researchers are urged to select problems in their 'issue area' or interest group mandate—environmental, economic, labour market, energy policy, etc.¹²

The modernist approach imagines this narrowing of focus is acceptable for most studies because it assumes the accumulating fragmented insights will automatically cohere into a unified body of knowledge that accurately portrays, even predicts, events in the larger oil sands development picture. This resulting body of knowledge helps us technically "unlock the secrets of nature" and enables major increases in "human health and wealth."¹³

When *government policy makers and regulators*, oil companies, and even some critics rely exclusively on the fragmented knowledge produced by this approach to identify problems and devise solutions, however, real troubles start. Solutions devised for problems defined this way can tend to take on the character of *technical adjustments* to the overall process of exploiting the oil sands. While many narrowing approaches can provide useful information and knowledge, relying too heavily on this approach may lead us to fail to address these narrower dimensions in the context of the larger dynamics and deeper influences driving the whole set of developments. Consequently, many technical adjustment

¹⁰ Donald Polkinghorne, *Methodology for the Human Sciences: Systems of Inquiry*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983.

¹¹ Some studies emphasize the economic side or interests of this development (like shortage of skilled workers, or skyrocketing construction costs), others examine the social situations (like family tensions, housing situations, foreign worker integration, drug abuse), some groups and studies stress the environmental side of oil sands developments (like water usage, green house gases, surface and wetlands reclamation, impact on ecology and wildlife), other studies stress the political aspects of the oil sands developments (like government royalty structure, provision of infrastructure, environmental and other regulations), and yet others examine the historical dimensions of the oil sands (like industry involvement, government subsidy of technical oil sands research).

¹² I should note, parenthetically, that two anti-positivist approaches were developed in competition with this modernist approach—the "descriptive or phenomenological approach" and the second the "hermeneutic or interpretive approach" (Polkinghorne, *Methodology for the Human Sciences*, p. 201 and see chap. 6). But, he observes, the positivist position clearly won the debate. The study of human phenomena has come to be conducted under standards and procedures adopted from the physical sciences. Experimental procedures with operationally defined variables are used to determine correlations and law-like relationships among various aspects of the human realm.

¹³ J. R. McNeill, 2000, *Something New Under the Sun*, 328.

solutions *end up tackling symptoms only* and, in some cases, paradoxically *make these problems worse*. Sometimes technical adjustments developed on the basis of fragmented knowledge may even end up *creating new, more-perplexing problems*.

This is the outcome, I argued in the 2008 CPSA paper, of the erroneous assumption that fragmented knowledge simply and accurately adds up to extensive and comprehensive knowledge of the whole. In fact, I conclude, the modernist approach to analysis can end up *obscuring the central thrust of the oil sands developments!* In order to address and solve the problems inherent in current oil sands developments, we need all actors—including governments—to develop solutions that also address the deeper, central thrust of this phenomena.

Part I: Various understandings of government’s role at play in the oil sands

In this paper, I build on the above arguments and explicitly focus on the role of the government/state in creating and solving ‘the world’s most unsustainable development.’ The natural question that emerges from a listing of oil sands problems is: where was the state/government when these problems and issues emerged? Why did the Canadian and Alberta governments not enact preventative care [pre-care] policies, or once serious problems routinely began to emerge, start to enact more adequate clean up, restoration [post-care] policies, as well as accompanying new pre-care policies that would turn-around, radically redirect [stop, alter, slow, etc.] development? Was the government, in fact, asleep at the switch, and if so, why did that occur? *To re-phrase, how is it possible that a democratic Albertan, or Canadian, government could allow, endorse, even encourage these oil sands developments, without dealing with this vast array of problems, questions, and troublesome outcomes they knew were being produced?*

In this part, I briefly inventory the understandings of Albertan and Canadian government’s role that have been utilized in the development of the oil sands.¹⁴ These understandings of the government’s role either shaped, or were expressed in debate with, the various governments’ actual policy roles in oil sands developments. In order to present these briefly and efficiently in this section, I use three different typologies. Each typology focuses on a different central concern, which then serves to arrange the spectrum of resulting political ideologies. In actual historical practice, the understandings of government’s role were most often drawn from the standard spectrum of liberal understandings. In some cases, a particular government may actually have used understandings of the government’s role that come from more than one typological position. Furthermore, the three typologies should be understood as complementary and cross-cutting; each one adding another concern in the government’s role, and thus to its actual functioning in the oil sands. I offer a few historical and contemporary tar sands examples of most of these particular views of government on each typology.

Defining the state’s role in terms of degrees of state “interference” in the market

The most popular and well-known family of political ideologies operating in our society today, and in the oil sands, can be grouped along a single continuum corresponding to the standard, textbook ideological spectrum of left – right. The ideologies presented along this spectrum are ideal types, of course. They are placed on this first continuum because they all accept the idea that the *market* plays a role in society’s achievement of material plenty and human happiness. They are spread out along this continuum, however, based on their different answers to (often with intense debate) the question of

¹⁴ The most extensive history exploring the roles of government in the tar sands development is Paul Chastko, *Developing Alberta’s Oil sands*. Also see Laxer, James, *Canada’s Energy Crisis*, (new updated edition), Toronto: James Lorimer, 1975; Earle Gray, *The Great Canadian Oil Patch: The Petroleum Era from Birth to Peak*, Edmonton: June Warren Publishing, 2005, updated from 1970; and Rowland, Wade, *Fuelling Canada’s Future*, Toronto: Macmillan, 1974.

how much *state* involvement is required to ensure the market successfully promotes economic growth and prosperity. I briefly introduce this family of ideologies, along with oil sands examples.

A) Classical liberal view

On the so-called¹⁵ right-wing of this typology, we find the political ideology of classical liberalism. It emphasizes the market must be left as free as possible, *laissez faire*, and allows only a minimal role for a night-watchman state. Governments should maintain law and order in the oil sands, define and protect private property, set up basic services and infrastructure, enforce essential standards and regulations, and otherwise allow the market to determine what economically happens further.

Historically in the tar sands, the classical liberal view of government's role shaped the functioning of a variety of Alberta Governments, including Earnest Manning's Social Credit government. Once the conventional oil boom began following the 1949 Leduc oil discovery, for example, the Manning Government was willing to help fund basic research to continue perfecting oil sands recovery and exploitation techniques, but it was not willing to allow the oil sands operation to become commercially viable (through government funding and regulation) and to "artificially" compete with the conventional oil industry that now formed the backbone of the Alberta economy.¹⁶

More recently, Premier Ed Stelmach's comments that the government should provide necessary services for the province and industry to flourish and the market will eventually control itself is a more recent example of this ideology. "There's no such thing as touching the brake," Stelmach said, "the economy, growth – that will sort itself out. We just want to make sure that we're globally competitive."¹⁷ At another point, when "[a]sked about the call for a moratorium [on oil sands development], [the Premier] instead warned of the consequences of a "total shutdown." If that's what they're asking for, he said, "you devastate Alberta's economy, you devastate Canada's economy, you put at risk hundreds of billions of dollars of investment, and there won't be one social program that's going to be alive, anywhere."¹⁸

B) Reform liberal view

Towards the [so-called] centre of this typology, are political ideologies advocating an incrementally larger role for the state in the tar sand. Reform liberalism, for example, accepts the market does indeed efficiently generate material plenty but argues that government ought to interfere in the market to correct certain flaws. Some more recent tar sand market failures include, for example, high housing rental rates, infrastructure shortages, inequitable income distributions, GHG increases, etc. Historically, this understanding is at work in the Alberta Liberal Government's oil sands actions early in the 20th century, under Premier Rutherford.¹⁹

Former Premier Peter Lougheed provides both a historical and contemporary example of this view of government. In the 1970's, Lougheed's government created, for example, a variety of semi-state organizations to support oil sands industrial development. Chastko observes, "Through a variety of organizations, like the Alberta Research Council, Abasand, or the Alberta Energy Corporation, the provincial government in Edmonton shared the risks of development with the private sectors."²⁰ In 2008, now former-Premier Lougheed, seemed to be using this ideology when he "blamed the former

¹⁵ The ideological left-right spectrum is deeply flawed, in my opinion, and riddled with assumptions that emerge from the same fundamental sources as do the polarized ideologies which it serves to classify. In that limited way, it still serves a small purpose in this case.

¹⁶ Paul Chastko, *Developing Alberta's Oil sands*, chapter 3.

¹⁷ From a story by Archie McLean, with files from Canadian Press, "Stelmach won't 'brake' oilsands growth: Quebec nation debate sparks call for same rights in Alberta," *Edmonton Journal*, Dec. 5, 2006.

¹⁸ Hanneke Brooymans, "Slower oilsands growth urged," *Edmonton Journal*, Feb. 1, 2008.

¹⁹ Paul Chastko, *Developing Alberta's Oil sand*, 2004, chapter 1.

²⁰ Paul Chastko, *Developing Alberta's Oil sands*, p. xv.

Premier Ralph Klein for the runaway development,” and further argued: ““They should have never allowed so many of these projects to go ahead at the same time.””²¹

The current mayor of Fort McMurray Melissa Blake offers another current example of this view of government at work.²² She joined Lougheed in wanting continued economic growth but arguing that the government’s role must include “slowing down” and managing the oil sands development process.

C) Social Democratic

Towards the [so-called] left of this ideological spectrum, we see social democrats who agree market flaws need to be addressed, but identify more flaws and advocate further that the state engage in more *planning* to deal with tar sands developments. Government should ensure stable and predictable economic growth, plan for sustainable use of the resource, and guarantee equitable distribution of the ever-growing economic pie.

At the provincial level, this view of government was injected in debates by some Opposition MLAs and think tanks. This understanding of government’s role was pursued, to some extent, at the national level during the oil shocks of the 1970s. The federal government intervened heavily in the market by adopting the National Energy Program, which included measures on “taxation, regulation, and the creation of a crown corporation, Petro-Canada, to foster energy self-sufficiency.”²³ This understanding of government’s role animates some critics of the current government’s approach to the oil sands.²⁴

Conclusion: What is striking about this family of political ideologies, in terms of my research question, is that they are largely oriented towards maximizing economic growth. They argue, often ferociously, over how much government action is required to ensure that the market produces material prosperity. But, there is very little discussion of whether this type of tar sands development actually moves us to human happiness, and whether the problems emerging from oil sands development are adding to, or subtracting from, human and environmental wellbeing.

Defining the state’s role in terms of a national or international route to security and prosperity

A rather different emphasis people use to shape, and consequently categorize, political ideologies concerns government’s orientation to, and assessment of, the importance of national security and flourishing vs. international cooperation and integration. This second typology, or family of ideologies, has influenced and shaped some understandings of the state’s role in the oil sands. The focus of this typology and family of ideologies, is whether national wellbeing is best achieved by governments pursuing national security, autonomy and independence or whether it is better achieved by governments working for, and through, global cooperation, integration and international institution-building? Again, this is a standard textbook typology, but it helps set the range of understandings operative in the oil sands, as well as some protests against these government policies.

²¹ Hanneke Brooymans in “Slower oilsands growth urged,” states, “Peter Lougheed also repeated his call for a slowdown of oil-sands development during and appearance Thursday [January 31] on CBC’s *The Current*. “Lougheed blamed the former premier Ralph Klein for the runaway development.” ““They should have never allowed so many of these projects to go ahead at the same time.” “Now Stelmach is caught because of pre-existing obligations, he said. It won’t be something he can turn around overnight.”

²² “Shifting Oilsands,” *Telegraph Magazine*. September 15 2007. Accessed on September 21 2007 from http://www.telegraph.co.uk/arts/main.jhtml?xml=/arts/2007/09/15/sm_oilsands.xml&page=3.

²³ Paul Chastko, *Developing Alberta’s Oil sands*, p. xvi, and chapter 7.

²⁴ For analysis of the tar sands from a “left” perspective, see Larry Pratt, *The Tar Sands: Syncrude and the Politics of Oil*, Edmonton: Hurtig, 1976. John Richards and Larry Pratt, *Prairie Capitalism: Power and Influence in the New West*, Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1979. Also see many perceptive comments on the tar sands in Pratt, Larry and Ian Urquhart, *The Last Great Forest: Japanese Multinationals and Alberta’s Northern Forests*. Edmonton: Newest, 1994.

A) Internationalist view of government's role

Towards one end of this typology is *internationalism*. While there are many variations of this ideology, internationalists tend to argue that human progress occurs best when the world is structured with the proper international institutions—e.g. the United Nations, collective security pacts, human rights charters, international law, and often, free trade agreements. Governments work best when they lead states to cooperate with, and advance, these global institutions. As superior global institutions are constructed, innate human goodness will surface, the economy will grow, people will prosper, and global peace will advance.

In this ideology, the oil sands could be seen as an important energy source for meeting human needs in an interdependent world and for ensuring prosperity world-wide. One version of internationalism, used by some members of the oil industry, promotes rapid development of the resource so it can be sold to anyone worldwide willing to pay. This is believed to eventually yield the happy outcome of increased global prosperity, development of impoverished states, and the spread of liberal democracy world-wide.

Historically in tar sands debate, this ideological has frequently surfaced. One prominent version promotes a ‘continentalist’ orientation to energy policy, i.e. Canada should integrate its energy system with the United States. Paul Chastko concludes, for example, “When commercial development of the oil sands began in the early-to mid-1960s, it was the result of a fortuitous combination of American interests, American capital, and the access to American markets.”²⁵ Clearly, a continentalist viewpoint had come to dominate tar sands exploitation. A host of other examples could be produced.

B) Nationalist view of government's role

On the opposite end of this typology, *nationalism* argues that the world is divided between states that fundamentally operate according to power, national-interest and realist assumptions. The only reliable basis for prosperity, in this world order, is to strengthen one’s own state power and autonomy, grow a strong national economy, increase the state’s military strength, and form fortuitous alliances.

Historically in the tar sands developments, nationalism was a shaping force only at certain key moments. Two key examples, both at the national government level, are the energy policies developed during WWII and the National Energy Program of the 1970’s. We also see this ideology at work in US energy policy towards the oil sands, in response to an obsession with national security in the post 9/11 era and the US invasion of Iraq. American interest in the Canadian tar sands appears to be driven by its own nationalism.

Various Canadian *opponents* of current oil sands policies exhibit a social democratic version of *economic nationalism*. The Parkland Institute, for example, argues that trans-national oil companies plan to send unrefined bitumen products extracted from the Canadian oil sands directly to the USA for upgrading, refining and production of end-products.²⁶ This serves the American economy and military machine, it argues, but ignores Canada’s true national interests.²⁷ Canada loses the major benefits

²⁵ Paul Chastko, *Developing Alberta's Oil sands*, p. 101.

²⁶ Gordon Laxer, *Freezing in the Dark: Why Canada Needs Strategic Petroleum Reserves*, Edmonton: Parkland Institute, January 31, 2008; retrieved Feb. 11, 08, from <http://www.ualberta.ca/PARKLAND/research/studies/index.html>.

²⁷ Hugh McCullum argues, for example, highlights “the profound economic, ecological, and social costs at stake” in the oil sands developments, and underlines that most oil heads south to a military-obsessed American Empire. See *Fuelling Fortress America: A Report on the Athabasca Tar Sands and U.S. Demands for Canada's Energy* (Released by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, the Parkland Institute, and the Polaris Institute) March, 2006, p. 10. Retrieved Oct. 22, 2007, from <http://www.ualberta.ca/PARKLAND/research/studies/Fuelling%20Fortress%20America%20WEB.pdf>. He wants this solved by stimulating “public discussion, debate, and action towards a new made-in-Canada energy policy and strategy.”

arising from investment in upgrading and refining, as well as related jobs and other economic spin offs. Canada is vulnerable, they argue, because it has failed to develop an appropriate national energy policy. Economic nationalists argue that Alberta and Canadian governments must adopt regulations and policies requiring oil companies to upgrade and refine bitumen in Canada. This would ensure economic spin-offs stay in the country and provide wealth and prosperity at home, increase our tax base, and enable us to finance other important social and environmental solutions.

Conclusion: The two ideologies on this second typology can be, and have been, fused relatively comfortably with political ideologies on the first typology. Both ideologies in this family offer many important insights. While focusing on the legitimate concerns of nationalism and internationalism, however, proponents of these views of government do not seem to question the underlying belief that increased economic growth is essential for progress. They focus and debate competing orientations and approaches to achieving progress, but do seem to extensively question the dominant society's materialist, consumerist and wasteful way of life, the obsession with constant economic growth, nor nature's ability to absorb the resulting massive interventions. At this level at least, these ideologies do not appear to conflict in any serious way with the ideologies on the first typology.

Defining the state's role in terms of individual autonomy vs. scientific mastery

A third typology offers two additional ideologies that can, and have been, combined with the above political ideologies with significant and fascinating results. It's difficult to suitably name each type, so I label them the *free individual in a democratic-state* and the *technocratic expert in an administrative-state*. Disagreement within this typology centres on whether progress is best achieved by harnessing the knowledge and action of free autonomous individuals through a democratic state, or by applying technocratic scientific expertise through an administrative state? The government's role turns out to be quite different in each case.

A) *The free individual in a democratic-state*

In this ideal type, human mastery and progress are believed to be best realized through the autonomous and rational exchange of free individuals realized through democratic state mechanisms, and/or through market mechanisms. The state ought to be democratically structured in order to respond to and channel the knowledge and demands of a multitude of free autonomous individuals.

One version of this ideology, democratic pluralism,²⁸ assumes that whatever the majority of free autonomous individuals democratically desire and demand ought to become the agenda of government. According to pluralist theory, *public interest* policies emerge spontaneously and mechanically from the democratic *private interest* competition of individuals and their groups. This assumption is sometimes accompanied by the somewhat utopian anticipation that this democratic practice will automatically and dramatically improve the world.²⁹

B) *The technocratic expert in an administrative-state*

In this ideal type, human mastery and progress are believed to be best realized through the application of scientific and technological expertise, applied by scientifically-literate administrators in [public *and* private] bureaucracies. Thus, the state should be structured as an administrative apparatus that objectively gathers and applies the best scientific expertise to problems in society. Proponents of

²⁸ See Martin J. Smith, "Pluralism, Reformed Pluralism and Neo-pluralism: the Role of Pressure Groups in Policy Making," *Political Studies*, 38 (1990), 302-322.

²⁹ This is similar to the idea of classical liberals that the market mechanism automatically produces the public good by adjudicating multiple demands of autonomous individuals.

this view tend to argue that science produces the highest forms of expertise, and therefore governments should not, first of all, listen to the demands of individuals and interest groups because they may reflect limited, biased, or flawed knowledge. Rather, government should structure itself as an administrative state containing, or able to access, the leading scientific knowledge on problems. In describing the ‘administrative state,’ Robert Gibson states, “the world should permit the appropriate experts, armed with the suitable methodologies, to define the problems correctly, to identify the appropriate response options, and to reach the rational conclusions.”³⁰ The administrative state could even resort to undemocratic policies if they promise to expertly solve issues and problems and thereby promotes greater human happiness and progress.

Conclusion: These two ideologies focus either on democracy or science, both of which can be valuable means for serving society. Depending on which one is emphasized, however, the state’s role can swing dramatically from mechanically implementing the democratic desires of autonomous individuals to administratively imposing policies based on scientific expertise. Significantly, both positions assume a mechanistic understanding of state and politics and both positions depend on the fragmented knowledge-products of the modernist approach to scientific analysis. Clearly a deeply troubling inner tension lives at the core of these two positions.³¹

In practical Canadian politics, governments have at times adopted, or tended towards, one or the other of these positions. Ironically, both the [so-called] ideological left and right—as defined in our first family of ideologies above—could, and have, advocated both democratic pluralism and the administrative state.³² In other words, ideologies from the first two typologies can cross cut with an ideology from this last typology. Classical liberals intent on freeing the market as much as possible, for example, may square off against ideological compatriots over whether oil sands issues should be decided through democratic, consultative and participatory means [e.g. Premier Klein’s declared tendency of consultation] or through the technocratic administration of scientific expertise [e.g. apparently more common under Premier Stelmach]. This is a real issue in contemporary debate. We see the same polarizing tendencies within other ideologies, including social democratic approaches. Furthermore, a single acting government may end up using both of these ideologies simultaneously, in spite of the internal tensions, but in different parts of government or on different policy issues. In Alberta, for example, Conservative Governments have sometimes simultaneously supported democratic pluralism as well as administrative state approaches. They have used interest group [stakeholder] consultations to resolve conflicts, for example, while simultaneously relying on the scientific expertise of its bureaucracy—and/or that within corporate bureaucracies—to impose technical adjustment solutions on other equally risky and controversial problems. This tendency has frustrated democratic NGOs busy working on issues in the oil sands.

³⁰ Robert B. Gibson, “We Just Don’t Know: Lessons about Complexity and Uncertainty in Canadian Environmental Politics,” in Robert Paehlke and Douglas Torgerson, eds., *Managing Leviathan: Environmental Politics and the Administrative State*, 2nd edition, Broadview, 2005, 145.

³¹ Significantly, an irresolvable tension lives at the core of these polarized models of politics. On the one hand, autonomous rational individuals should be absolutely free to shape their futures, doing so through pluralist interest group competition and shaping of public policy. These rational individuals thus end up developing scientific knowledge to allow them to master nature for their free use. On the other hand, once these rational individual develop scientific expertise, it seems best to place the determination of key decisions over conflicting development interests and desires, in the hands of the experts. The administrative state has the capacity and scientific expertise to understand the world and to determine the best public policies. Free individuals do not necessarily have this capacity, so democracy should take a back seat to the administrative state.

³² Think of left and right wing populism, and right and left-wing technocratic states. See also the very helpful discussion of the “technocratic orientation” and “sociocratic orientation” that cuts across the ideological spectrum, in the Dutch Scientific Council for Government Policy [WRR], *A policy-oriented survey of the future: towards a broader perspective*. [Summary of the twenty-fifth report to the government], The Hague: SDU, 1983.

Drawing conclusions from these ideologies:

We have inventoried the various understandings of the role of government, and offered some examples of them at work in the government's action on the oil sands.³³ Most often, the classical liberal and reform liberal ideologies have directed and shaped the Canadian and Alberta government's role in the development of the oil sands. Sometimes, this occurred in combination with a nationalist or internationalist ideological emphasis. To complicate matters further, at times government action has been shaped further by a 'democratic-state' emphasis or a 'technocratic administrative-state' emphasis; and sometimes, both simultaneously! Thus, the historical roles of the government in tar sands development have been complex and contested. In spite of these various government roles, however, we find ourselves in the situation today where the oil sands are seen increasingly as 'the world's most unsustainable development.'

Why were these understandings of governments' role actually used to direct government in dealing with the oil sands development if they led government to largely ignore, downplay or postpone dealing with growing and serious problems? How could a 'democratic state,' for example, or a 'technocratic administrative state' for that matter, allow tar sands development to proceed when it was so manifestly obvious that they are troublesome and problematic? The clue, I argue, may be found in the way each of these political ideologies assumes, in spite of manifest differences, a common commitment to a deeper faith in progress. I should note, parenthetically, that other ideological perspectives were historically present, or joined, in the oil sands debates, and compete for attention on practical policies, e.g. feminism,³⁴ post-modernism, various forms of environmentalism, traditional conservatism, refurbished neo-Marxism, and other approaches.

Part II: Explaining why certain understandings of government's role were actually used to develop the oil sands

To set the stage for consideration of this question, I outline a few leading contenders that explain why one or another understanding of the state's role actually becomes operative in a particular society.

Liberal pluralist theory argues that society is composed of autonomous rational individuals who are free to democratically choose and value as they will.³⁵ Leading liberal theorists have argued that individuals rationally choose to create a form of government that they believe will best respect their individual rationality and autonomy and best promote their self-interest.³⁶ Adam Smith argues, for example, that individuals rationally adopt the *free market* as a means of exchange because they calculate that it is the best way to secure human prosperity and happiness. John Locke argues, similarly, that the enlightened self-interest of individuals leads them to rationally conclude that a *liberal democratic state* best serves their long-term interests in freedom and property. Liberals argue that the rational calculation of individual self-interest leads citizens to adopt democratic government and liberal markets.

³³ Ideas on the state's role become institutionalized. As McNeill notes, "When an idea becomes successful, it easily becomes even more successful: it gets entrenched in social and political systems, which assists in its further spread. It then prevails even beyond the times and places where it is advantageous to its followers... Big ideas all became orthodoxies, enmeshed in social and political systems, and difficult to dislodge even if they became costly." J. R. McNeill, *Something New Under the Sun*, p. 326.

³⁴ Feminist approaches push for an order in which fragmentation into public and private spheres is removed and power relationships between genders are equalized.

³⁵ See Martin J. Smith, "Pluralism, Reformed Pluralism and Neo-pluralism: the Role of Pressure Groups in Policy Making," *Political Studies*, 38 (1990), 302-322.

³⁶ See Thomas Hobbes, *The Leviathan*, Adam Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, and John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*.

In contrast to this liberal individualistic explanation, *classical Marxist theorists* argue out of a class conception of life and society. They suggest the liberal idea of the state is merely the reflex, a determined outcome, of the class interests of the capitalists. Marx and Engels write: “The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas i.e. the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production... The division of labour.... manifests itself also in the ruling class as the division of mental and material labour, so that inside this class one part appears as the thinkers of the class (its active, conceptive ideologists, who make the perfection of the illusion of the class about itself their chief source of livelihood), while the others' attitude to these ideas and illusions is more passive and receptive, because they are in reality the active members of this class and have less time to make up illusions and ideas about themselves.”³⁷

An alternative *neo-Marxist explanation*, potentially instructive for the oil sands case, suggests the state should neither be understood simply as the reflex of the rational self-interest calculations of individuals nor as merely the reflex of a ruling capitalist class. Rather, neo-Marxists like James O'Connor³⁸ argue the democratic capitalist state results from two forces. First, the state shapes itself, and engages in the activities it does, in response to the powerful capitalist class's demands for ‘accumulation policies.’ Second, as a democratic state, it is partially autonomous from the capitalists influence while being partially dependent on democratic support. Thus, it also produces a variety of ‘legitimation policies.’ This *two track model* results in the state creating accumulation policies to support capitalist interests in profit, and legitimation policies to support the democratic masses’ interests in educational, social and health programs. One would expect, according to this explanation, that government oil sands policies could be explained in part as a response to accumulation pressures of capitalists, and in part as a response to the democratic pressures. This could explain, perhaps, more democratically inspired social and environmental policies for the oil sands implemented along side corporate-oriented economic policies.

What is striking about these three explanations—of why certain understandings of governments’ role were used to shape government action on the oil sands—is that none directly challenges the key underlying cultural assumptions of economic growth and progress.³⁹ While the class-based explanations help us to understand why distributional questions became primary or were ignored, they like the others, fail to explain why the assumption of progress was not tackled as a possible cause for government ignoring so many outstanding tar sands problems.

An explanation centred on ‘Faith in Progress’

Some of the more-recent explanations of government’s role do challenge this assumption, e.g. theories inspired by eco-feminism, more radical versions of environmentalism,⁴⁰ some types of post-

³⁷ Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, (1845).

³⁸ See James O'Connor, *The Fiscal Crisis of the State* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1973), and for a Canadian application of this explanation, see Leo Panitch, *The Canadian state*, Toronto: U of Toronto Press, 1977. Also, see Philip Resnick, “Political Economy and Class Analysis: A Marxist Perspective on Canada,” in John H. Redekop, ed., *Approaches to Canadian Politics*. Scarborough: Prentice-Hall, (1983, & 1993), 337-359.

³⁹ See for example, the incisive studies by Gordon Laxer, *Freezing in the Dark*, and Hugh McCullum, *Fuelling Fortress America*.

⁴⁰ Even more mainstream versions of environmentalism are identifying this. See for example, Ted Nordhaus, Michael Shellenberger, *Break Through: From the Death of Environmentalism to the Politics of Possibility*, Houghton Mifflin, 2007. This book grew out of the discussion provoked by their earlier essay: Michael Shellenberger and Ted Nordhaus “The Death of Environmentalism: Global warming politics in a post-environmental world,” released at the Oct. 2004 meeting of the Environmental Grantmakers Association. Available at http://thebreakthrough.org/images/Death_of_Environmentalism.pdf.

modernism,⁴¹ and other approaches.⁴² As a contribution to understanding this category of challengers of progress, I present and explore the explanation developed by Dutch economist and philosopher Bob Goudzwaard,⁴³ inspired by the Augustinian Christian tradition. This tradition emphasizes the notion that the central direction-giving force in human agency is the human heart. Another way of putting this, he argues, is that the practices and structures of a ‘way of life’ reflect that, which those who shaped them, most deeply love.⁴⁴

In explaining why certain understandings of government’s role have tended to dominate in the late 19th and 20th century industrializing West, Goudzwaard observes that the dominant ideologies of liberalism and socialism have certainly engaged in vehement disputes over important questions. Over time however, he argues, the deep and broad range of disputes between these ideologies tended to narrow as these ideologies grew closer together on key practical questions. “The struggle between liberalism and socialism,” he states, “narrowed down to *who* is entitled to the fruits of technological-economic progress and *from whom* should they be derived.” [References to *Capitalism and Progress* appear as C&P 116].

Thus, debates over the government’s role centred increasingly on questions of the “distribution” of “income, welfare, and economic power” (C&P 116). Simply put, as discussed in the first typology above, liberal capitalism argued that distribution would occur best through the free market and a minimal role for the state. Social democrats argued that while the market was indeed productive, it was deeply flawed in achieving equitable distribution, so a greater government role was required here. Furthermore, there was also debate over who should shoulder the burden of inputs into production. They agreed that capital brings investment and workers contribute labour, but social democrats also argued the state needs to bring some things into production process, such as, socializing risks of investment, providing infrastructure, and giving access to cheap resources (C&P 110).

While liberals and socialists argued hotly about the state’s role in these senses, Goudzwaard notes, there was no longer big difference between these movements on “the *nature, orientation, and destination* of welfare, knowledge, and power” (C&P 117, my emphasis). They no longer grasped, or were no longer concerned about, the “*meaning, manner and tempo* of this progress [rapid material growth] (C&P 117, my emphasis).

⁴¹ See Michel Foucault. *Discipline and Punishment*, and *Power and Knowledge*. For Foucault’s version of an integrated approach see “A Brief Paraphrase of the First Chapter of The Archaeology of Knowledge & The Discourse on Language ,” by Michel Foucault, courtesy of Lois Shawver, Chapter One, *The Unities of Discourse*, retrieved April 17, 2008 from <http://users.california.com/%7Erathbone/fouarc.html>.

⁴² For example, see Ulrich Beck, *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity*, translated by Mark Ritter, London: Sage Publications, 1986, and Ulrich Beck, “Episode 5 - Ulrich Beck and Bruno Latour,” *CBC Ideas*, December 12, 2007, accessed March 6, 2008, at <http://www.cbc.ca/ideas/features/science/index.html#episode5>. Also see Ulrich Beck, *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity*, translated by Mark Ritter, London: Sage Publications, 1986

⁴³ Bob Goudzwaard, *Capitalism and Progress: A Diagnosis of Western Culture*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979. Also see Bob Goudzwaard, Mark Vander Vennen, David Van Heemst, *Hope in Troubled Times: A New Vision for Confronting Global Crises*, forward by Desmond Tutu (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007); Bob Goudzwaard, *Idols of our Time*, Dowers Grove: Intervarsity, 1981; and Bob Goudzwaard and Harry de Lange, *Beyond Poverty and Affluence: Towards a Canadian Economy of Care* (Toronto: U of Toronto Press, 1994). Bob Goudzwaard, “Who Cares? Poverty and the Dynamics of Responsibility: An Outsider’s Contribution to the American Debate on Poverty and Welfare,” in Stanley W. Carlson-Thies and James W. Skillen, eds., *Welfare in America: Christian Perspectives on a Policy in Crisis* (Grand Rapids, MI/Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans, 1995), 49-80. One of the key influences on Goudzwaard was the philosophy developed by Herman Dooyeweerd in *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought* (4 vols.). Amsterdam/Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing Company, 1953-1958. For a more accessible introduction to Dooyeweerd’s thought, see *Roots of Western Culture: Pagan, Secular and Christian Options* (Toronto: Wedge, 1979).

⁴⁴ See Augustine, *The City of God*.

What is 'faith in progress'?

Goudzwaard defines faith in progress as a particular set of beliefs, given wing during the Enlightenment, that assume rational human beings can marshal the *means* necessary to guarantee achievement of their most desired *goal*. In particular, the progress myth suggests we can achieve the ultimate human goal of freedom and happiness, if we develop a comprehensive scientific understanding of nature, use this knowledge to develop technologies to master and exploit nature, continually increase economic growth and material prosperity, and thereby guarantee the ultimate goal of happiness. Thus, faith in progress suggests that the *means* of **science, technology and the market**—and in some ideological variations, also the *state*—could ultimately guarantee attainment of the *goal* of human happiness.

'Faith in progress,' Goudzwaard contends, has shaped a goal-oriented, **tunnel society** – one that seems to be racing through a tunnel but always towards an "ever receding goal" (C&P 186). Progress aims to *liberate* human beings through market production aided and guided by science and technology. By rationally mastering nature society believed it could guarantee ever-increasing prosperity and thereby maximise human happiness. The end result, Goudzwaard argues, is that society has been **paradoxically hypnotised by progress**. Instead of *liberation*, society finds itself trapped, powerless and *enslaved*, rushing towards its goal, but never able to get there. In the meantime, the progress myth keeps demanding that people, society, and the environment *adjust* to the saving means that promises to deliver the goal.

Goudzwaard's explanation, when applied to the tar sands developments, offers compelling insights into this development process and our globalizing society. Here is one possible conclusion we might form. Many Albertans, as with most Canadians, are so obsessed with achieving the goal of material prosperity that they allow the market unrestrained freedom to develop the oil sands as 'it' wishes, all with the blind hope that in the end—guided and corrected by a series of merely technical adjustments—these developments will guarantee attainment of the goal at the end of the tunnel, namely prosperity and human happiness. This single-minded confidence in scientific development and technological innovation as *means* to this *goal*, signal the presence of some sort of 'faith in progress' at work in the oil sands development.

Goudzwaard develops a further step in his explanation of how 'faith in progress' influences a society. Our society's single-minded commitment to the means need to achieve our goal of guarantee happiness *tends to generate a variety of very difficult problems*. The Enlightenment faith in progress through science, technology, and the market has ushered a **relentless dynamic** into modern society. In *Hope in Troubled Times* (with co-authors Mark Vander Vennen and David Van Heemst, hereinafter referred to as HTT), Goudzwaard and his colleagues argue, that this dynamism of progress is the "**deeper source of the paradoxes**" we face in society (HTT, 90 my emphasis). They explain: "Paradoxes ... clearly emerge at the dividing line separating what can expand as a result of the current technological and economic dynamism and what is simply not in a position to expand." (HTT, 90). Thus, "problems morph into insurmountable paradoxes where and when the laws of the dynamism set the tone" (HTT, 90).

Goudzwaard and his colleagues elaborate: "...on one hand a number of problems today are becoming increasingly immune to the tools and instruments of progress. And on the other hand those same tools and instruments weigh more and more heavily on us because we view them as inevitable manifestations of the very progress we simply cannot miss out on" (HTT, 25). Thus, he and the co-authors conclude, "perhaps...progress itself has become our problem" (HTT, 25). Unfortunately, they conclude, having become **hypnotized by progress**, we are no longer able to resist or see beyond the promises and temptations of progress. We continue to pursue the dynamistic solutions prescribed by progress, in spite of increasing signs of that they are beginning to fail us.

In order to come to grips with these types of problems and paradoxes, Goudzwaard advises, society needs to dig much deeper. He observes that "almost every current diagnosis [science and

analysis] of the crisis of our time lacks something fundamental” (HTT, 26), namely, a clear consideration of “the roles played by *people’s deepest longings, dreams, and commitments...*” or “*spiritual or religious dimension... of contemporary events,*” and an understanding of “how these profound aspirations become inscribed in the dynamic forces, interactional patterns, and institutions of contemporary Western society.” (HTT, 26, my emphasis) Confronting these value questions is not a trivial matter, since a more holistic and integral approach to analysis might open the door “to *alternative, perhaps unforeseen solutions, genuine solutions* that could actually help turn around rising insecurity, global poverty, and environmental degradation.” (HTT, 26).⁴⁵

A similar pattern emerges in the tar sands debates

We see a similar pattern in the liberal and socialist ideological debates over tar sands policies. We see plenty of evidence of difference over the proper role of government in establishing adequate royalty returns, planning or not planning for economic growth, subsidizing or not new ways of improving the technology to extract bitumen, solving social, environmental and labour problems, improving economic efficiency, and so forth. There were questions and debates over the government’s role in conservation of resources, i.e. full use of resources and avoiding waste. There were debates over continentalist versus nationalist orientations to develop the oil sands, about keeping economic benefits within the country, and guaranteeing Canada’s energy future, and so forth.

In all these policy debates, however, there is precious little evidence of discussion over the “*meaning, manner and tempo* of this progress” (C&P 117). There were superficial questions about pace, but these came out of a position that wanted to slow down, and plan a bit more, in order to ensure more and sustained economic growth. No one seemed to clearly ask if our society genuinely needs ‘more’ growth in order to be happy. No one asked if perhaps we already have too much of the kinds of goods and services that ‘progress’ produces. Have we passed ‘sufficiency,’ a sense of ‘enough,’ and begun to actually decline in happiness because society is over-stressed, the environment too damaged, weakened, and diminishing, and the economy simply producing too many distorted and un-needed goods? Perhaps we should have our society stop economic growth, in order to assist the global south to develop more, and more *less* actually mean *more*, when it comes to genuine happiness? Only a few people have asked these questions at the periphery of the oil sands debates, such as Mark Anielski, in the excellent study *The Economics of Happiness*.⁴⁶ Anielski asks questions like “What’s wrong with progress?” and suggests solutions that could slowdown distorted forms of ‘progress.’

Part III. An alternative, care-based understanding of society and government

To round out this exploration of Goudzwaard’s approach, I briefly examine how he responds to a progress-shaped society, and what he identifies as an alternative understanding of government’s role. If society and governments are currently doing little to grasp, counter, slow or re-direct ‘progress’ in the development of the oil sands, what changes need to be adopted in our understandings of society and the government’s role?

Goudzwaard sketches a range of possible **responses** that scholars and social movements have taken in reaction to the “complex of problems” in society generated by the progress myth (C&P 163): including *revolution* (C&P 164, 150), *escape* (C&P 167), *counter culture* (C&P 169), *revision of*

⁴⁵ Others have also argued that contemporary problems reveal our reliance on some sort of “faith.” For example, see J. R. McNeill argues in *Something New under the Sun*: “almost everyone, communists included—worshipped at this same altar because economic growth disguised a multitude of sins.” He talks about “...adherents to the faith [economic growth] and refers to it as a “state religion.” New York: Norton, 2000, p. 334. See Ted Nordhaus and Michael Shellenberger who conclude that we need to take a “collective step back to rethink everything” including our “vision” and “core set of values” and create “new institutions and proposals.” See *Break Through*.

⁴⁶ Mark Anielski, *The Economics of Happiness*, New Society Publishers, 2007.

society and/or of 'man' (C&P 173), *continual adjustment* to means of progress (C&P 150), and *paralysis* (C&P 150). I suspect you have seen some of these at work in our society. He rejects each of these responses, however, in favour of the position he calls “disclosure.” He argues disclosure can move us towards a more open society. I first outline the idea of disclosure in society and then explore what disclosure means for government’s role.

A) Towards disclosure in society

The notion of disclosure (C&P 186) involves re-orientation from a progress-driven, goal-oriented, tunnel society, to a form of society that ‘discloses,’ or actualizes, norms for human and environmental well-being and flourishing. Goudzwaard identifies several measures that we could adopt to move towards disclosure.

First, we must begin “testing or monitoring ... all allegedly progressive measures” (C&P 238). If measures are proposed to achieve progress, e.g. the oil sands developments, Goudzwaard suggests we ask whether these measures are justified merely because they claim to advance “economic, technical and scientific progress”—which is a form of self-justification by progress (C&P 193)—or whether these measures will indeed further genuine human and environmental wellbeing.

Second, we must implement measures to radically “break with the horizon of utilitarian happiness, including its perspective on labour and human normative responsibility” (C&P 242). We need to reject the limited, rationalistic, cost - benefit approach to choices and decisions. This reductionist view of happiness overlooks how our choices are almost always embedded within a larger social and economic horizon that may be rushing single-mindedly towards a distorted goal. By breaking with the utilitarian idea of happiness, we remove pressure to adjust ourselves and our choices to a progress-obsessed society and to its notion of development. In the oil sands, we frequently see mentality reflected in appeals to “calculate” and “balance” the costs and benefits of particular changes, e.g. balance economic benefits with environmental costs. All the while, this calculation fails to take into account the dynamic overall tar sands development project—and the way of life accompanying it—to which the recommended adjustment would be a presumed ‘corrective solution.’

Third, disclosure means we need to revalidate norms. All ideologies recognize norms such as freedom, justice, equity, stewardship and peace. All too often, however, ideologies instrumentalize the content of norms in order to make them serve the attainment of an over-riding goal. Norms become afterthoughts, therefore, rather than starting points for action. In real life, Goudzwaard argues, norms resist such redefinition. Norms are not artificial additions to reality, nor arbitrary impositions of human will, but have their own validity within reality. Norms are not pernicious limits and restrictions on people that threaten to confine their lives. Rather, they are internal guides that point us toward actions that open up and promote human and environmental flourishing (C&P 242-3).⁴⁷ In the development of the tar sands, for example, some corporations have willingly realized the norms of efficiency and effectiveness but side stepped other norms, e.g. integrity of creation, social justice, and so on. These practices have produced environmental destruction, social breakdown, and economic deficits. Unfortunately, the burden of dealing with these problems have then been shifted to government, NGOs, unions, churches and others to solve.

Fourth, disclosure requires we implement measures that expand “the degrees of freedom for the redirection of technology” (C&P 238). In a progress-oriented view of development, science, technology and economic growth are often viewed as indispensable means for achieving human happiness. We are told that we must obey them or they will fail to deliver our much-desired goal. We hear this refrain frequently in reference to the tar sands. Disclosure, however, means we recognize that

⁴⁷ He argues for the ‘simultaneous realization of norms’—which presupposes the simultaneous validity of legal, ethical, and economic standards for every human action and act, see *Capitalism and Progress*, 205-6; he credits this idea to T.P. van der Kooy, “Methodologie der economie en christelijke wijsbegeerte,” *Philosophia Reformata*, vol. 40, (1975), pp 1-32.

there are indeed ‘degrees of freedom’ in how we deploy the ‘means’ to achieve development, and ‘degrees of freedom’ in how we define and understand ‘development’ (see C&P 201f).

Fifth, disclosure requires we implement measures to restore “human responsibilities to their original sphere” (C&P 238). A variety of cultural institutions have developed in our society, each with its own distinctive functions, purposes and responsibilities. In the economy, therefore, we need to reintroduce “direct full responsibility in the production sector of society” in keeping with all norms (C&P 209). This means that organisations must acknowledge the problems we face, in view of this faith in progress, and take on responsibility to internally realise, and be guided by, norms in order to achieve genuine wellbeing. Civil society actors must hold each other, businesses and government accountable for their choices.

The notion of disclosure points to a distinctive way of understanding action steps. Instead of engaging in *technical adjustment steps* to the overall dynamic system of tar sands development—as well a progress-shaped way of life—disclosure requires *reorienting action steps*. Reorienting action steps can awaken hope in society, Goudzwaard argues, by helping people see that paradoxical problems are often related to failed technocratic solutions. They pose an invitation to re-orient our approach to development. They can help society “retrieve the capacity to participate in turning these major predicaments around.”⁴⁸ Well designed steps can help defuse the ideological spirals that drive society through the tunnel of progress and instead open up degrees of freedom to try alternatives. Furthermore, action steps ought to be designed to solve one problem while simultaneously ensuring they have positive effects on other problems. Finally, action steps should be surrounded by a broad-based public discussion, involving all major societal actors, that is aimed at developing overlapping understandings of problems and consensus around new action steps.

B) Government’s role in disclosure

What would the government’s role look like, if formulated within this disclosure orientation? To begin with, government has its own unique functions and responsibilities in society. Goudzwaard states: “It is impossible, of course, for the government to bring about disclosure on behalf of society. Disclosure is the responsibility for society as a whole. It is a matter of a mutually accepted willingness to shape culture in a different direction” (C&P 221). But government has an important contributions to make “toward an open society” (C&P 221).

Within our current distorted context, Goudzwaard advocates two modes of government action. First, they can enact “**pre-care**,”⁴⁹ or preventative care, policies that set a framework for responsible societal unfolding, i.e. in which social actors and institutions can take up their distinct types of responsibility to achieve normative human and environmental wellbeing and flourishing. Second, governments can enact “**post-care**,” or remedial policies, i.e. policies that alleviate and repair existing problems.

In acting for disclosure, Goudzwaard argues, “government can create a measure of room for individual enterprises to accept a broader conception of their task, and it can stimulate them to implement this task” (C&P 221). Business needs to “be made publicly responsible for ‘opening up’ the economics and technology of its operation to a proper respect for the environment.” Stewardship belongs properly to “all producers and consumers” so “the role of government ... must be such that this responsibility is brought back to where it belongs, even if this requires a special type of intervention” (C&P 222).

⁴⁸ Goudzwaard, Vander Vennen, and Van Heemst, *Hope in Troubled Times*, 25. For an example of this type of action steps see, “A 12-step program for economic recovery,” in Goudzwaard and De Lange, *Beyond Poverty and Affluence*.

⁴⁹ On “pre-care” and “post-care” see Bob Goudzwaard and Harry de Lange, *Beyond Poverty and Affluence: Towards a Canadian Economy of Care*, Toronto: U of Toronto Press, 1994.

This can occur through both positive and negative measures by government. When the problem is a neglected task, government can enact *negative measures* that require a “branch of industry,” for example, to reduce pollution levels to a stipulated level in a fixed time frame, or government will legally close down the industry (C&P 221). A *positive measure* advancing disclosure, he argues, might involve the government giving companies the legal predicate, ‘public company,’ which could be used in sales promotion. This name would be awarded if the company has “given sufficient evidence of adequate concern for the environment, good internal social relations, and service to the consume in the form of quality products” (C&P 222). In this way, these companies are rewarded by being able to “appeal directly to responsible consumers” (C&P 222).

C) A normative conception of the state’s role

Goudzwaard argues for a flexible, principled, but non-ideological, view of the state’s role. He argues that the government should be guided by all norms, but especially the norm of public justice, in its work. This includes four dimensions:

- **Public arbitration** involves “intervening between groups or institutions in society.” Not all societal interactions automatically concern government, nor do all *collisions of interests* in society concern government. But when “a misuse of power takes place that threatens the life-possibilities of a weaker group” (“Who Cares” cited as WC, 78)⁵⁰ the resulting collision of interests becomes a government and state concern. In the tar sands developments, for example, the collision of interests between the health, water, hunting and other concerns of aboriginal communities living near or downstream from massive oil sands operations, and the interests of the powerful trans-national corporations running them, urgently need government involvement in order to be justly addressed.

- **Public provision** involves acting on critical unmet needs in society. Again, this is not automatically government’s task. The government should act on welfare policy, Goudzwaard argues, “in the name of public justice, if there is a lack of something crucial to the public welfare, for instance elementary schooling, the maintenance of peace in the streets, the removal of garbage, the availability of primary health care. If such things are not supplied privately and/or they are not accessible to the poor, then the government is obligated to step in, just to be a shield for the poor in the name of justice.” He continues, “Public provision also means that government is entitled to obligate all citizens to contribute proportionately to social insurance so that all citizens have access to the necessary financial means to cope with personal and family emergencies” (WC, 78-9).

In the case of the recent tar sands boom, therefore, the critical shortage of low-income housing in many overheated local markets and skyrocketing rental rates had outstripped the ability of many to pay. The enablement and/or provision of low-cost housing is a critical concern of government in this existing situation. In a preventative mode, however, a government should encourage mass transit in cities as one way, among many, of reducing transportation fuel use and thus the pressure to develop the oil sands.

- **Public regard** involves government attending to key problems in society. He writes, “governments cannot solve all the problems of society. Most activities of life are not, certainly not in the first place, the responsibility of government nor the product of its motion. They are rather the domain of families, friends, farmers, artists, educators, entrepreneurs, employees, and more. But it can happen that some essential tasks are not institutionalized, or that society has so degenerated that persons and various institutions are unable or unwilling to fulfill their respective and diverse responsibilities” (WC, 79). In the tar sands developments, for example, corporations considering the development of the oil sands have not considered the full social and environmental impacts, and their associated responsibilities. They have not responsibly included full-cost accounting of the many diverse impacts of their operations, and have narrowly focused only on the efficiency and effectiveness

⁵⁰ Bob Goudzwaard, “Who Cares? 49-80.

of their bitumen extraction processes. Government should have acted forcefully in the past, and should now act urgently, to ensure these actors take up their full social, environmental, and economic responsibilities and thereby contribute to the common good. If this is not possible in the current situation, perhaps a moratorium should be placed on development of the oil sands, and if companies refuse to comply, perhaps relevant licences should be withdrawn.

Concern for the direction of society as a whole involves government scanning for, and initiating public discussions on, broad-ranging issues that concern the overall direction of society. This can occur when some actors, or even society as a whole, become so obsessed with “private material interests that there is a concrete and explicit denial of original human callings and mandates... e.g. to take care of all human and natural resources [and instead] spoil and misuse those resources...” He continues, “in such cases, government must act to ensure, as far as that is in its power, the fulfillment of responsibilities.” Again, this does not mean government ought to control all private lives and organizations. Rather, when “gross dereliction of responsibilities damages the entire commonwealth, government may never idly stand by when this happens. It must act to defend and preserve the commonwealth.” (WC, 79)

In the tar sands developments, concern the overall direction of society takes on a rich meaning. One dimension of this role, for example, might mean that the overall constellation of problems and issues linked to oil sands development require a full reassessment of our society’s approach to *both* energy consumption and production. Government could appropriately decide to place a moratorium on new leases, a freeze on permits for new mines and SAGD operations, and open up society-wide discussions on whether and where we ought to go with overall oil sands developments.