

THE MYTH OF PROGRESS: Toward a Sustainable Future by Tom Wessels excerpted with permission of University Press of New England, [www.upne.com](http://www.upne.com)

## THE MYTH OF PROGRESS

### A Need for Cultural Change

“[I] attribute the social and psychological problems of modern society to the fact that society requires people to live under conditions radically different from those under which the human race evolved.” □—The Unabomber<sup>1</sup>

“The more materialistic values are at the center of our lives, the more our quality of life is diminished.” □—Tim Kasser<sup>2</sup>

#### *A Hierarchy of Progress*

In 1978 Marcia and I started building our house by cutting, hauling, and barking one hundred white pine trees from our property. These pines were used to build our scribe--fitted log home. The two-story saltbox has a passive solar design, with interior thermal mass from the log walls and a large central brick fireplace to capture and hold the sun's heat. We use a stove to complement solar heating and burn, on average, three cords of wood a year. Our kitchen stove, water heater, and backup space heater run on propane. We have thirty acres of woodland that take up more carbon dioxide in photosynthesis than Marcia and I release from the burning of wood and propane annually. In this regard our -environmental -footprint is pretty good, but we are far from minimalists as environmental practitioners.

We have two vehicles—a four-wheel-drive truck and a Toyota Echo. We have two computers and printers—an iMAC and the Macintosh we bought in 1989. By all standards the older Macintosh is obsolete, but I wrote my first book on this computer, and it still works. I can't bring myself to get rid of it. So I use it whenever I write letters or small documents that I need to print. We have a television that gets no reception, so it is used with a VCR. We have a CD player and radio for music and news. We have a washing machine, but not a drier since we hang clothes to dry. In the kitchen we have a refrigerator, a toaster, a blender, an electric crock-pot, and an electric coffee grinder. I also have a chain saw, a radial-arm saw, a skill saw, a jigsaw, a router, and an electric drill. Marcia, who enjoys yard work, has a lawn mower. Other than lights, the only other electronics that we have are a ceiling fan to circulate air and our water pump. We don't have a cell phone or answering machine for our phone.

We have been pretty conscious about our purchases, particularly of items that consume energy, yet compared to a vast majority of people on this planet we are extremely affluent and our material possessions allow us to live a life of comfort and ease. Even my grandparents, if they were alive today, would be in awe of some of these items—two cars, two computers, a VCR, a CD player! These possessions are clear indicators of what I call *material progress*.

There is no doubt that as a culture we have witnessed material progress that has increased convenience, extended life expectancy, and dramatically expanded communication and information sharing. Most of the indicators used to support our reigning paradigm of progress relate to materialism. Yet, I believe that materialism is much too limited an indicator with which to mark progress. Much more important trends of progress relate to the physical well-being of citizens, their emotional well-being, and community well-being—what Robert Putnam in *Bowling Alone* labels social capital. Together all form a hierarchy of progress.

Community well-being occurs when citizens make personal sacrifices to help people, and even non-human organisms, that lie outside their circle of family and friends. They are helping directly those they wouldn't otherwise have contact with in their daily activities. A society in which most of its citizens engage in this kind of benevolent activity has truly progressed. Individuals who engage in community outreach have expanded their emotional sensitivities to encompass a much larger sphere than just those they know.

I recently heard a short commentary on Vermont Public Radio by a University of Vermont student. Rather than heading south to a sunbathed beach for spring break, she spent her time in a city she had never visited before to help the homeless. This young woman truly displays an expansive compassion for less privileged people that radiated far beyond her own community to people she helped and most likely will never see again.

In contrast, the emotional attention of some people is -focused solely within themselves. In this way their bodies -become a cell for their emotional life. For these people everything is judged by "how it affects *me*." These judgments are usually negative, causing individuals to feel that injustices have been committed against them and that they are due compensation. For people like this, other human beings don't really exist—they are simply agents of wrongdoing. Expanding the emotional sphere outward, a person may -embrace her -immediate family or a tight circle of friends. For these individuals, only family members or close friends are important—people outside this sphere are not of concern. A further expansion may incorporate extended family, friends, and even acquaintances. Then there are those like the UVM student whose attention goes well beyond their family and friends, to people they don't even know. In these individuals compassion and empathy are highly developed, as is their connection to others. Interestingly, similar connections happen in forests between mycorrhizal fungi and trees.

Mycorrhizae are fungi that live in the soil and get their energy from the roots of living trees. These fungi are not parasites, though, because they help trees to dramatically increase their absorption of water and nutrients. Both trees and mycorrhizal fungi benefit from their interactions; for many species of coniferous trees, this interaction is necessary for survival. In 1997 a study was conducted in a Douglas fir and paper birch forest in British Columbia to quantify just how much of the trees' energy was consumed by their mycorrhizal fungi. To do this, carbon dioxide labeled with carbon 14—a rare and radioactive form of carbon—was introduced to the Douglas fir in order to find out how much of the carbon 14 ended up in the mycorrhizae as carbohydrates produced by the trees. An unexpected and rather profound finding came out of the study.

Paper birch trees that were struggling in the forest received as much as 6 percent of their energy from carbohydrates produced by surrounding Douglas fir. The extra energy was fed to the struggling birch by the mycorrhizae.<sup>3</sup> In this way the mycorrhizae acted like tree shepherds helping along struggling members of their flock. The action of the mycorrhizae benefited the entire forest ecosystem by maintaining or increasing photosynthetic rates,

nutrient retention, and species richness. Just like the mycorrhizae, our task as individuals is to progress in a manner in which our attention, compassion, and empathy grow ever-outward to benefit our communities and society as a whole.

However, to accomplish this kind of progress individuals first have to reach a state of emotional well-being. They have to feel good about themselves and engaged in their lives. Their experience needs to be *fulfilling*.

I need to make a distinction here between fulfillment and pleasure. Pleasure is an ephemeral experience; once the object that gives it is removed, pleasure fades. Eating ice cream is quite pleasurable, but once the ice cream is gone, so is the experience. Fulfillment, on the other hand, has staying power. Love is a fulfilling experience. Even if our loved ones are not present, their impact stays with us. Pleasure can never lead to emotional well-being because we can't carry it with us, but fulfillment can. In order to foster community outreach, a society has to be developed to the point where its citizens are emotionally healthy and fulfilled by their experience of life.

To be emotionally healthy, most people need to be physically healthy, too. Physical well-being results from a healthy lifestyle—nutritious diet, exercise, and good sleeping habits—and is marked by vitality. Physical well-being is not derived from medical intervention, such as the use of pharmaceuticals. Once medical intervention is needed, physical well-being has already been compromised to some degree.

On the bottom rung of this hierarchy we find material progress. Material progress can foster physical and emotional well-being. But it can also erode them if a society becomes too focused on materialism and affluence. Tim Kasser's research, as well as the research of other psychologists who have looked at the relationship between materialism and well-being, consistently shows that once people are financially above the poverty level, aspirations for increased affluence are associated with decreases in happiness. The more affluent people become, the greater the rates of anxiety, depression, and social isolation. Studies also show that with increased affluence people use more drugs and alcohol and have decreased levels of vitality.<sup>4</sup>

As previously mentioned, the indicators of progress that we most commonly use relate to material progress—GDP, per capita income, and increasing life expectancy—and they are all measures of quantity rather than quality. Let's look at the last indicator: life expectancy. People in the United States are living longer due to medical technology—a form of material progress—but are they living physically healthier lives? I pointed out in the introduction that one out of three Americans is overweight and obesity has seriously increased by more than 400 percent in the last two decades.<sup>5</sup> Asthma rates continue to increase, particularly in children.<sup>6</sup> An estimated 6.5 percent of Americans are diabetic, many of these due to obesity.<sup>7</sup> Heart disease continues to be the number one killer. These are all diseases that have a strong environmental basis. They are indicators of a society in which the physical well-being of citizens is deteriorating, not progressing, and contribute to the annual rise in healthcare costs. A similar trend can be seen in emotional well-being: Skyrocketing rates of environmentally induced unipolar depression and suicide hold as the eighth leading cause of premature death. Yes, we are living longer due to medical interventions, but do these trends suggest we are living better?

When people gain too much material affluence, their focus is often turned to their possessions and the maintenance of an affluent lifestyle. It's true that possessions can bring ephemeral pleasure, but as Kasser's work points out, rarely does consumption lead to

fulfillment. When an individual's focus is primarily directed at material wealth, his attention is drawn inward, shrinking his emotional sphere. Even though he may have the financial means to promote community outreach, it isn't necessarily on his screen. In this way possessions can develop ownership over people as they become enslaved to a material-rich lifestyle—an enslavement that can erode both physical and emotional well-being. I contend that our society has focused far too long on materialism as a means to progress, halting real societal progress. Today there is a loud call to rework our educational system to prepare a more sophisticated work force that will be able to handle the new, highly skilled jobs that globalization will produce. I hear fewer voices out there calling for changes in education to promote social capital or engaged citizenship; as a matter of fact, voting rates in the United States have dropped below 50 percent. How is it that a country that is the hallmark of democracy has witnessed the erosion of civic responsibility? I believe that the pursuit of material progress has usurped the sociopolitical ideals on which the United States was founded.

### *Ancient Cultural Values*

In the previous chapters I have applied a scientific perspective to point out why our current path to progress is not sustainable. Here I am stating that it also isn't possible due to societal values that focus primarily on material progress and give rise to ever-increasing consumption. I have pressed the point that real progress will be attained only if we develop a socioeconomic model that fosters diversity and energy conservation, and achieves a dynamic equilibrium in which the amount of materials and energy consumed annually remains the same and can be supported by the biosphere. Such a system becomes possible if we can slow and then reverse global population growth, and develop cultural values that turn us away from ever-increasing consumption and toward progress in physical, emotional, and community well-being.

Economist Herman Daly has already developed a model for a socioeconomic system that functions in dynamic equilibrium. David Korten, in his book *The Post-Corporate World: Life After Capitalism*, goes further in modeling “living economies” that function under the same principles as life's complex systems. Korten's basic attributes of living economies grow out of the concept of self-organization in biological systems—that systems increase complexity, diversity, integration, and stability through time. Korten advocates replacing huge multinational corporations with smaller local and regional businesses that are specifically adapted to the region they serve. If these businesses are publicly owned, the ownership is by citizens of the region. In this way businesses and their shareholders will work for the good of their community and regional environment rather than solely attempting to maximize profit. Businesses should share information and work to support each other rather than engaging in competitive exclusion. This cooperation would result in more specialized and integrated commercial enterprises. Businesses should strive to be frugal and very efficient in their use of material and energy resources. This would not only decrease consumption and waste but allow more resources to be available for other businesses.<sup>8</sup>

These are just a sampling of the ideas that Korten develops in his book. Along with other economists, he shows that sound, sustainable, economic models already exist. But in order to engage in such a socioeconomic system, we will need to embrace a new set of cultural values—what I call *ancient values*. These are not the “traditional values” that some

politicians claim will elevate society—values that characterized late nineteenth-century America. Although traditional values stress the importance of family, they also support a rugged individualism that promotes individual entitlement regardless of its social or environmental consequences. A large part of the problems we face today has been spawned by individual entitlement and its self-absorbed focus. In order to really progress we need to look to far older values—ones that existed long before the development of agriculture. To explore these ancient cultural values I recount the following -experience.

It's 1993 and I am about four miles north of where we are camped in the Pinacate region of Mexico. It is what we call "solo day"—a chance for students on this Antioch desert ecology field study trip to explore and connect to this unique landscape in their own way. I'm using the day to explore a new area of the Pinacate—the most glorious hot desert landscape that I have ever encountered.

It's been a wet winter and spring, so the desert is lush. Fields of brilliant apricot-colored desert mallows cover black cinder substrates. Older, reddish lava flows are carpeted by the yellow bloom of brittlebush. Most appealing of all is the ocotillo, with its emerald green wands topped by flaming crimson flowers. In most deserts with light substrates, these colors would look washed out during the day, but in contrast to the black cinders and lava flows of this rugged landscape, any color is brilliant. It is the combination of this geologically young, volcanic landscape and its exquisite mix of vegetation that places the Pinacate at the heart of our desert -experience.

I crest a ridge formed by an old lava flow, descend into a desert basin dominated by creosote bush, and cross a large arroyo—a dry streambed. As I start to climb out of the drainage I see a pile of lava rocks about 200 feet to my left, up on the lip of the arroyo. I alter my course to check out the cairn. As I approach it, I stumble upon a significant find—something I have previously only read about—an ancient footpath.

The footpaths of the Pinacate link lava-lined water holes called tanks and eventually lead to the Sea of Cortez for the gathering of salt. The path is a distinct trough in the desert floor. Large and small rocks glistening with desert varnish line its sides. Desert varnish is a coating of manganese and iron oxides that ever so slowly coats desert rocks that remain set in place. I pick up one of these rocks; its dark chocolate-colored varnish is as smooth to the touch as enameled porcelain. Such a layer of desert varnish takes millennia to form if the rocks remain fixed in their positions during that time. The varnish confirms that this footpath is thousands of years old. I try to imagine how many generations and how many feet traversing this path pushed the rocks to their present places of rest?

The last native people to walk this path were the O'odham, also known as the Papago. Before them, it may have been the Hohokam. Before the Hohokam, unnamed hunters and gatherers lived here for millennia. Varnish-covered Clovis spear points dating back to 12,000 years ago have been found embedded in these footpaths. Based on microscopic inspection of the desert varnish that covers rocks associated with the Pinacate paths, some researchers have pushed the paths' origins back to 35,000 years ago. This assertion has sparked a lively debate, but even if these footpaths are only 12,000 years old, it still makes them the oldest landscape antiquities in North America.

Instinctively, I step onto the footpath and start walking in my thick-soled boots. I see up ahead that the path is going to enter one of the Pinacate's youngest lava flows. The realization stops me in my tracks, because I remember reading that the first Spaniards to

encounter the O'odham in the seventeenth century mentioned that they crossed this landscape barefoot. The Vibram soles of my boots are chipped and scraped by just a few days of exploration of the Pinacate's lava flows; one lug has been cut right off. What kind of feet did the O'odham people have? And then, in that moment opened by my question, a second, more profound one arises in my mind: What was life really like for the ancient hunter-gatherers who used to walk these paths?

I'm sure life was physically tough and very hard times were common. Summer temperatures regularly climb to more than 120 degrees; on the black cinder flats ground temperatures can burn exposed skin. During some years this desert region receives less than an inch of rainfall. At such times food and water are scarce, demanding deprivation and long desert treks. The Spanish explorers of the seventeenth century couldn't comprehend why native people chose to live here. From the European perspective, this region of the Sonoran was not only a wasteland but also the very vomit of the Earth—an entirely unwholesome and unclean place. Yet I have a strong sense that even though life was physically difficult and life expectancies were short, the *experience of life* for the people that lived here thousands of years ago was extraordinarily rich. I base this on the following suppositions.

Hunter-gatherer desert culture was based in nomadic clans of a few dozen people. Within the clan group each person had a specific role, and the entire clan group relied heavily on each other and shared all that it had. Like all hunter-gatherer groups, if someone was successful in a hunt, the meat was shared with those who didn't have success. If any individual accumulated too many possessions, a giving-away ceremony took place so that no one individual had too much. In this way, these ancient people practiced reciprocal altruism as a means to survive in this harsh environment. There was no room for personal greed. All individuals had a direct voice in how the affairs of the clan would develop—whether they should move to the next tank, celebrate a particular occasion, or conduct a sacred ritual. For these people the idea of needing to *create* community would have been absurd. They *were* community—on the deepest of levels. Through stories and rituals, in joy and sorrow, they shared the very core of their lives. I believe that this very strong sense of community, where each member was truly an integral part, greatly enriched their experience of life.

Not only did each individual have a critical place within the clan, each individual also clearly knew his or her place within the world. Through rich traditions, in the form of stories, rituals, and sacred practices (all of which had been passed from generation to generation for hundreds, possibly thousands of years), these people were seamlessly woven into their landscape. As hunter-gatherers they saw themselves as a part of the land, not apart from it, sharing it with all the other plants and creatures on whom they depended for survival. Their world made sense—it was truly their home. Even though the desert is harsh, it holds a beauty and mystery that I have found in no other landscape. As a once-a-year visitor I can vividly sense the vitality in this place. It has a deep impact on me, but I can't begin to imagine the depth of the ancients' experience of, and connection to, this land. I am confident that their experience of life was also greatly enriched due to their intimate connection to this place.

Finally, like all hunter-gatherers, they had plenty of time to socialize, tell stories, make crafts, and reflect on their existence. Reflective practice is essential to convert knowledge into understanding and, eventually, wisdom.

Knowledge and understanding are often used interchangeably, but I see them as distinctly different. Knowledge is the acquisition of factual information. It is strictly a mental phenomenon. That our bodies comprise more than thirty trillion cells is a piece of my

knowledge. Understanding, on the other hand, is being able to comprehend the meaning or implications of knowledge. Just how many is thirty trillion? In addition to thinking, understanding is characterized by both an emotional and physical response. Where knowledge is black and white, right or wrong—the sort of stuff that is tested for in objective exams—understanding is the many-layered lotus blossom. There is always room for deeper understanding. It runs from the sense of AH HA! depicted in cartoons as a light bulb going off over someone's head, to epiphany, to deep revelatory experience. Where knowledge is static, understanding is dynamic, multifaceted, and always carries with it some level of fulfillment. Understanding is an experience that inflates us.

On the other hand, if we carry too much unprocessed knowledge, it can deaden us. I used to teach a Concepts of Biology course at Antioch. It was a class for students who never had a college-level biology course. The two most common reasons that these students didn't take biology as undergraduates were that they either mistakenly got the impression in high school that they just weren't good at science, or their experience with high-school biology was utterly boring. For me, it's hard to imagine biology as boring. When we start to have a glimmer of understanding regarding the complexity of biological systems and how beautifully they function, it becomes completely engrossing. How could anyone be bored by biology? For the Antioch students the answer to that question lies in high-school courses that, based on a linear mode of instruction, were geared solely toward the acquisition of knowledge through the memorization of endless facts and terminology. Without any opportunity to reflect on that knowledge and translate it into understanding, their experience was deadening.

Reflective practice is not solely based on contemplation; it is also fostered through the arts. Painting, sculpting, composing and playing music are all means of reflective practice that don't involve verbal articulation. Artistic works help process knowledge and directly impact the emotional and physical centers of both the practitioner and the audience. As such, the arts also work for the promotion of understanding. The Pinacate's hunter-gatherers had ample time for reflective practice through their arts, stories, and time for contemplation, which all helped to forge a rich experience of life.

To have ample time for reflection to generate understanding, to be an intimate member of a rich communal life, to know your place in the world through vast traditions, to be intrinsically connected to the land: All these things work to create a rich experience of life—one I'm convinced these ancient people had.

### *Ten Thousand Years of Cultural Transformation*

These sorts of important connections and time for reflective practice are cultural attributes desperately needed today. Our species, modern *Homo sapien*, has existed on the earth for at least 150,000 years. For almost 95 percent of that time all humans shared a mode of life in the form of hunter-gatherer culture. They also shared connection to community, connection to place, and time for reflective practice as the foundation on which their culture was grounded. Why in today's society have these cultural attributes atrophied to such a -degree?

Ten thousand years ago, as global climates warmed after the last glaciation and growing seasons lengthened, a new form of human culture evolved—agriculture. Through time the village and extended family replaced the nomadic clan. People continued to have the strong communities, rich traditions, close connection to the land, and ample time for reflection that

grounded them in their world. But two important changes emerged with agriculture. The first was that the sense of being a part of the land was replaced by being *apart* from it. The idea of having dominion over the Earth represented in Genesis is a direct outgrowth of agriculture. Secondly, as villages grew in size, political hierarchies developed. This meant that the decision-making process was not equally shared by all. For the first time, many individuals no longer had the ability to be involved in decision making that directly affected their lives and culture.

For thousands of years, agricultural innovation allowed villages to grow and become cities with complex economies and transportation systems, but the development of urban settings (where the majority of the people were disconnected from some form of meaningful relationship with the land) didn't begin until 200 years ago, when industrial culture was ushered in on fossil fuel-driven steam engines. With industrial culture, extended families were shed for more-mobile nuclear ones as the ability to travel via ship, train, auto, and plane -became easier. Societal changes accelerated, and coupled with greater mobility, connections to traditions that grounded people to their place were lost—and with them was lost the ability to help people make sense of their world. Even though labor-saving technology made life physically easier, increasing the complexity of lifestyle actually left less time for reflective practice.

And today we find ourselves crossing the threshold into our fourth major cultural transformation. With the onset of global, postindustrial culture, we see dramatic shifts in populations due to political and economic upheavals, plus ever-changing job markets. Some estimates suggest that two billion people, or one out of three humans, have been displaced from their homelands in the past few decades by war and economic systems that have left them behind.<sup>9</sup> Gary Nabhan points out that the words “peace” and “place” have similar roots. Thus true peace and security are linked to being connected to one's place.<sup>10</sup> For people ripped from their homelands, both peace and quality of life have been seriously eroded.

In the United States, where people are not displaced by conflict, the job market has become increasingly prone to perturbations. Partially due to job market instability, by 1996 the average U.S. citizen had moved every 4.7 years.<sup>11</sup> How is it possible to build a connection to community or place when moving so frequently? To make ends meet, the vast majority of American families now have two or more wage earners, and many individuals work multiple jobs. In the mid-1990s America passed Japan to become the nation whose citizens work the longest hours of any country in the world.<sup>12</sup> Because of the impacts of working longer hours, families spend far less time together than they did just a couple of decades ago. Like the extended family a century ago, the nuclear family now finds itself under increasing pressures that threaten its integrity.

Although egalitarian decision-making was eventually lost with agriculture, elected officials in industrial democracies did bear the brunt of the decision-making process that impacted citizens' lives. Today many critical decisions regarding our collective global future are being made behind closed doors by trade representatives—appointed officials—often with the blessings of amorphous, transnational corporations. Never in the history of democratic societies has the populace been more removed from the decision-making process than it is today. The combination of these trends has not only isolated a large part of the populace, but also disenfranchised the vast majority of people in decisions that directly impact their lives, their culture, and the lives of future generations.

With voice mail, e-mail, call waiting, cell phones, and faxes, we are finding more time for “productive” ventures but less time for real involvement with people. For many, DVDs, computer games, sophisticated software, and the Internet are replacing the real world with a virtual one. Yes, we are gaining the sense that we are truly a global community. But is that sense being translated into greater community outreach? As the cascade of information that we are all exposed to grows exponentially, where do we find the needed time to reflect on it and extract understanding of the world around us? Where are our children being exposed to reflective practice when art and music programs are being cut in schools throughout the country and more and more time is spent in cyberspace? As T. S. Eliot writes in *Choruses from the Rock*, “Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge? Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?”<sup>13</sup>

In terms of traditions, what most typifies American culture today? The Super Bowl is a cultural event shared by more people in the United States than any other. When we reflect that a big part of its draw is a showcase for new advertising, we need to ask: Has consumerism become the icon of our culture? Watching the network news on November 25, 2005, suggests that consumerism has become the hallmark of our society. The lead story that night wasn’t about the war in Iraq, the federal deficit, or any number of pressing national issues, but rather about Black Friday—the vaulted shopping day that follows Thanksgiving. Just as Good Friday is one of the high holy days of the Christian faith, it appears that Black Friday ushers in the high holy days of shopping. As stated previously, consumption has become such an important tradition that our president no longer addresses us as citizens, but now as consumers. When our country is in crisis, rather than being asked as citizens to sacrifice, we are asked as consumers to shop! We are told that free trade and open markets will benefit the consumer with lower prices, so we will be able to consume even more. A little more than a century ago frugality was an inherent American ideal; today consumption appears to be the focus of our culture.

### *The Means to True Progress*

Of course, the last few paragraphs intentionally cast a decidedly one-sided description of the evolution of our present cultural state of affairs. In reality there are many wonderful attributes spawned by our cultural transformation over the last few thousand years. These include, to name a few, the rise of democratic institutions, advances in the rights of women, the expansion of civil rights, the advancement of scientific understanding, and further development in the arts. Yet, in a singular way, we have become the flip side of the coin from the Pinacate’s hunter-gatherers. Whereas their life was physically challenging but experientially rich, everyday experience has become physically comfortable and experientially poor for many Americans today.

Just as our hands and recessed eye sockets are the direct result of our arboreal past, our need for real community, traditions that help us find our way, connection to our place, and ample time for reflective practice is a direct result of our cultural legacy. Since these things are essential to being human, and intrinsically necessary if we are to have a rich, fulfilled experience of life, they are essential if we are to have real progress.

As we have been drawn away from connection to community, place, and reflective practice, a void has developed—what I call a “hollowness of experience.” That void is presently being filled by a need to consume. Yet ever-increasing consumption doesn’t make

us happier or more fulfilled; it does just the opposite.<sup>14</sup> As we have become isolated from community and place, reciprocal altruism and stewardship have been replaced by self-absorption. When we are connected to community and place we care about them, and our actions reflect that caring as we work for their well-being. Without those connections we lose awareness of how our actions impact others or the environment, and without reflective practice we also lose any sense of responsibility for our actions. As such, greed becomes possible and when linked to the need to consume, the combination allows for dramatically selfish behavior. How else can we explain the callousness displayed by CEOs and CFOs of bankrupt corporations such as Enron, Tyco, or WorldCom? The isolation of people from community, place, and reflective practice has become a crisis of culture.

To be able to engage in an economic system not based on continued growth, we need to find ways to sustain ourselves that are not based on materialism. Our attention needs to be turned toward fostering community, strong connections to place, traditions that link community to place, and reflective practice to generate understanding and eventually wisdom. These are the only means to bring forth true, sustainable progress for humanity.

#### Notes

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13. □ T. S. Eliot, 1952. *The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company), 96.
14. □ Tim Kasser, 2002. *The High Price of Materialism* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press), 21.