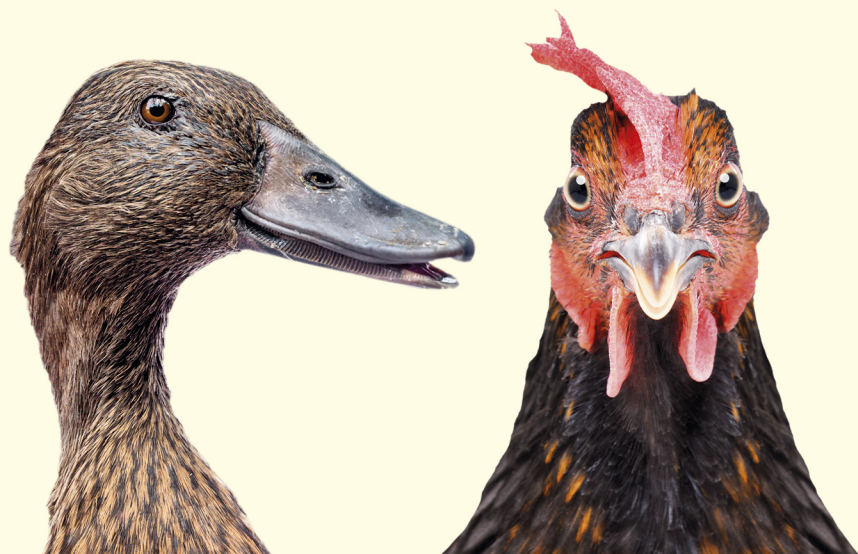


RESETTING  UR FUTURE

A Chicken Can't Lay a Duck Egg

How Covid-19 can solve the climate crisis



Graeme Maxton & Bernice Maxton-Lee

FOREWORD BY THOMAS LOVEJOY

What people are saying about

Resetting Our Future:

A Chicken Can't Lay a Duck Egg

Read and act on the wisdom of this book now. In another decade it will be too late.

Dr Susan George, President and Chairman of the Supervisory Board, Transnational Institute.

This book offers a trenchant analysis of the omni-crises that the world now faces with climate change, biodiversity loss, Covid pandemic and financial collapse. It makes compelling arguments for all of us to act now, and change all the systems that underlie human cultures and economies. A must read for every thinking person.

Dr Paul Shrivastava, Director, Sustainability Institute and Professor of Management, The Pennsylvania State University

This cry from the heart from two top policy insiders is a must read! The authors correctly support all the necessary grassroots uprisings for our common planetary future, especially by our children and grandchildren. Global elites are failing. They must give way to servant leaders who grasp humanity's remaining ten-year window to shift lifestyles and cultures toward planetary awareness and restoring its damaged biosphere, the basis of all life on Earth.

Hazel Henderson, futurist and an economic iconoclast. Author of *The Politics of the Solar Age* (1981) and *Mapping the Global Transition to the Solar Age: From Economism to Earth Systems Science* (2014)

Resetting Our Future: A Chicken Can't Lay a Duck Egg

The greatest threat facing humanity is climate change. Whilst we now have solutions, we lack leaders with the ability to implement them. New thinking, a new narrative and community commitment to force unprecedented change is vital. The pandemic, climate change on fast-forward, shows us that the “impossible” is actually possible when needs must. It is humanity’s greatest opportunity to turn a fractious and fragmenting world into a genuinely sustainable future. We cannot waste it. The Maxtons clearly set out the challenge, the urgency and pathways to that future. Let’s get behind it.

Ian Dunlop, Chairman, The Australian National Wildlife Collection Foundation

This book is bold, dramatic, and visionary. It brilliantly explains the many crises facing humanity and shows why Covid-19 provides a unique opportunity to build a better future. I hope humanity is up to the challenge.

Jorgen Randers, Professor emeritus of climate strategy, BI Norwegian Business School, Oslo. Co-author *The Limits to Growth* (1972) and author *2052 – A Global Forecast for the next Forty Years* (2012)

Will our societies go back to “normal” after the coronavirus pandemic, or will we turn crisis into opportunity and finally get serious about climate change? This is an engaging and unsettling little book that makes a powerful case for urgent and fundamental social change. You may not agree with everything the authors say, but they’ll make you think hard, and they’ll show you how to get to work with others on tackling the climate crisis.

Mark B. Brown, Professor of Political Science, California State University, Sacramento, USA

Resetting Our Future: A Chicken Can't Lay a Duck Egg

This book is an important intervention at a point where we face a historic choice: either to continue an economic system that is driving us to the precipice, or to create new social structures that allow both ecosystems and human societies to survive and to thrive.

Fabian Scheidler, Editor Kontext TV, author, *The end of the megamachine* Zero Books, 2020

Bernice and Graeme rightly argue that Covid-19 is a chance to accelerate the needed transformation. They point out that this requires escaping the colonial mindset that has made the urban elite blind to their embeddedness in nature. How can we ignore our host planet, and be blind to the destruction of the essential life-support it provides? Covid-19 helps us recognize that we are all one biology and that protecting ourselves is not just good for us, but it is the most effective way to protect others. Indeed, Covid-19 may be the last exit ramp on the highway to disaster. Take Bernice and Graeme's advice.

Dr Mathis Wackernagel, Founder and President, Global Footprint Network

Humanity's social, intellectual, religious, and cultural illness is destroying Planet Earth and depriving our children of a future. This brilliantly constructed, well-documented, no-punches-pulled argument for personal and global change entails tossing out old economic models (no more money), frankly facing the immediacy of the climate crisis, refocusing society from the individual to the community, admitting the weaknesses of unbridled capitalism, ending colonialism and other forms of exploitation, focusing on conservation, and embracing veganism. Buy ten much-needed copies, one for yourself and the rest for forward-thinking, committed, tough-minded, and effective friends who really want to save the world.

Daoist Monk Yun Rou

While many environmentalists are flummoxed over how to stop global warming because they can't see beyond tried and failed carbon taxes, Graeme and Bernice Maxton are scintillatingly clear: "We face an unprecedented crisis ... There is no market-based solution to these problems." There is no tech solution either. "The only way to avoid disaster is if almost everyone cuts their GHG emissions by at least 7% a year. . . This means 20% fewer cars in three years, 20% fewer planes, 20% fewer coal-fired powered stations, and 20% fewer ships. . . By 2040 they need to be zero. Societies also need to change the way they grow food, and stop all deforestation. Everything needs to change." We need a political and social revolution to create political and social systems that "function for the common good." The Maxtons contend that the only alternative to collective eco-suicide is a radical democratization of society to insure that the sacrifices we must make to save ourselves are shared equally and the benefits — a better mode of living, less work, better work — are enjoyed by all. I couldn't agree more. Young people, especially, should read this book!

Richard Smith, economic historian and author, *Green Capitalism, The God that Failed* (2016) and *China's Engine of Environmental Collapse* (Pluto Press, July 2020).

At a time when governments serve mainly the very rich, life- and planet-saving scientific knowledge is useless, unless a way is found to bring such knowledge straight to the people, penetrating their brains, hearts, and consciousness, triggering action. This book does just that, ever so effortlessly.

Chien-Yi Lu, Institute of European and American Studies, Academia Sinica and author, *Surviving Democracy—Mitigating Climate Change in a Neoliberalized World*

The Ancient Greeks had a word for this — a time of chaos, change and yet also opportunity. They called it Kairos. This book is

Resetting Our Future: A Chicken Can't Lay a Duck Egg

Kairos incarnate, passionate about the realities; clear about the changes we need; funny when it needs to be and pioneering in that it takes us from chaos to opportunity. Time for Kairos and this is the handbook.

Martin Palmer, Secretary General of the Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC), CEO of FaithInvest

This book pulls no punches. No misplaced faith in human technological ingenuity, or renewable solutions that magically occur without massive extraction of raw materials. We need a rapid and far-reaching transformation without further delay. Covid-19 shows us that governments can find money when they want to and carbon emissions can be reduced drastically — but this level of reduction must continue every year. We have to forget about “getting back to normal” and abandon the pursuit of economic growth fueled by endless material consumption. We must aim for balance with Nature instead. This book maps a communication pathway: get the facts straight, bust the myths, and speak out to all around us whether family, friends, school or job. Then target the climate criminals. A clarion call.

Dr Kerry Higgs, Associate, University of Tasmania, author of *Collision Course: Endless Growth on a Finite Planet* (MIT Press 2014)

Reading this book felt like having some smart, funny, and passionate people round for a dinner party where they explain things in a way that gets the point across while also being witty and engaging. Covid-19 has changed the world in radical ways - and that's exactly the point. The authors urge humanity to take this opportunity, where we've realized we can make huge shifts to the way we live, and harness it to fight climate change. If we don't, the consequences will make 2020 seem like a nice year. Opening with a story about eating breakfast with the Pope and sprinkled with references from Malcom X (the titular epigram) to Monty Python, *A Chicken Can't Lay a Duck Egg* expresses the

Resetting Our Future: A Chicken Can't Lay a Duck Egg

urgency of our planet's situation while also suggesting new ways forward.

Dr. Nazanin Zadeh-Cummings, Associate Director of Research,
Centre for Humanitarian Leadership, Melbourne, Australia

This book clearly outlines stark truths about impacts of climate change that political leaders of all stripes are unwilling to deliver because the news about what we face is so unsettling. We also read how the best responses to Covid-19 show the scale of what is needed to change direction on climate and that such changes are possible. Highly recommended!

David Berry, Director, Sustainable & Resilient Resources
Roundtable

RESETTING OUR FUTURE

A Chicken Can't Lay a Duck Egg

How Covid-19 can solve the climate crisis

Bernice Maxton-Lee

Former Director, Jane Goodall Institute, Singapore

Graeme Maxton

Climate activist, economist, and best-selling author



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Chapter 6

Prepare for a fight

Imagine an army driven into retreat, rapidly pursued by its enemies. There is a growing sense of fear in its ranks. After some time, the army comes to a wide, fast moving river. What lies on the other side is unknown. There is no other path, and no bridges or boats to get to the other side. Doing nothing will bring disaster. The army has to find a way to cross the river, even though it seems impossible and the risks are very high. There is no choice.

That is where societies find themselves with climate change. Societies have to find a way to leave where they are and move to a strange and unfamiliar place. Getting there will not be easy, but doing nothing brings certain disaster.

At some point enough people will realize this. We hope that realization will come soon, as a result of Covid-19. But it may not. It may come later. But, just like that army, enough people will eventually see that they cannot stay where they are, or continue to live as now. They will realize that humanity has reached an impasse and must find a different way. That is when radical ideas for an alternative approach will be welcome.

It is our most fervent hope that this day comes soon.

When societies are ready to consider a different model of human development, what will they need? That is the subject of the second part of this book.

Societies will need a blueprint for a different future. To slow the pace of climate change, the new system must be based on humanity living in balance with nature. People will need to live in better balance with each other too. To be sustainable, this new, clean-sheet future must be based on principles of equality – financial, sexual, racial, and equality of opportunity – but also

with the recognition that not every *opinion* should be treated equally when it comes to making wise, informed decisions in the interests of the majority.

While many of these conditions might initially seem like nice-to-haves, they are not. Creating a more balanced approach to human development is the only way the transition will work. Dignity and equality must be hard-wired into the new system.

Societies can't just tweak the system

Most countries have been riven by inequality and injustice for decades. The transition that lies ahead requires them to fix this. If societies do not eradicate these injustices, the future system will be unstable, which will make it impossible to successfully slow the pace of climate change.

People have worked tirelessly to grind down the harsh edges of the current system for years, to make it fairer, to make it work more effectively, to protect the weak, and prevent its many excesses. Most of those efforts have been well meaning, though not all. Some were cynical and designed to deceive. Yet all those efforts to make the system kinder and less damaging were mostly wasted because those working for reform were effectively trying to turn a wheelbarrow into a spaceship.

As we will explain in the next few pages, the dominant system of human development used in most of the world was specifically designed to maximize short-term profits for a small, wealthy group of people. An externality of the system is that it creates climate change, just as eating too much sugar rots your teeth. It is impossible to stop climate change within a system which focuses on increasing short-term financial gains for a wealthy few, because it is the push for growth and profit that is the source of the climate change problem. Likewise, the system cannot be made fairer for the majority, because it is the major source of injustice.

As human rights activist Malcolm X put it during his fight

against injustice and racism:

[I]t's impossible for a chicken to produce a duck egg – a chicken just doesn't have within its system [what is needed] to produce a duck egg. It can't do it. It can only produce according to what that particular system was constructed to produce.¹⁵

Malcolm X

The current system serves the interests of a small group. It excludes the majority of people, crushes new ideas, and opposes any other purpose. It cannot produce equality or ecological sustainability for humanity and all the other species living on earth today. It can only produce what it was designed to produce. And that is ever-higher short-term profits for the wealthy. This means that those who gain from the system, and so have power, do not want change, though they might sometimes say they do. Those who benefit from the system are incapable of reform. They do not know how to reform. They only know how to extract, to exploit, and to reproduce the conditions of inequality, ecological ruin, and injustice.

For change to come, the societies of the future need to be led by completely different people from those who lead them today. They need to be led by people who are mostly in their 20s or 30s, who have the most to lose, as well as by people who have not been brainwashed by the current system, and can imagine a different, less selfish approach to human development.

For decades, the vast majority of people have obediently gone about their lives, doing what the system expected them to do, doing their jobs, looking desperately for jobs when unemployment came knocking, voting Red or Blue or Green when they were told to, and believing that some intelligent, benevolent authority had their back. It never did.

Under the current system, money has always flowed *away* from the majority, while the laws which they thought might protect

them have been used to persecute them instead. Meanwhile, the sky has turned black with burning oil fields, the oceans have become slick and shiny with oil spills, and hurricanes and wildfires have destroyed people's homes.

In the harsh reality of the *non*-inclusive neoliberal capitalist world, Covid-19 has mostly killed the poor, and those who the system has made chronically sick through overwork, stress, and low-grade food. The virus has killed the street sweepers, hospital cleaners, meat packers, immigrants, and minorities in vastly greater numbers than it has killed political leaders, the rich, and the world's CEOs. That is not down to the victims' bad luck.

Modern legal systems, which often started with a desire to treat everyone equally, have become so corrupted that they reinforce injustice and inequality by protecting the powerful while punishing the weak for even tiny transgressions. George Floyd, a black American from an economically deprived background, was arrested in 2020 for allegedly using a fake US\$20 bill. He died fewer than 20 minutes later, choked to death by a white policeman kneeling on his neck, handcuffed, face-down, pleading for his life. Within days, Roger Stone, an American conservative political consultant and lobbyist, who had been convicted of obstruction of justice, tax fraud, blackmail, bank fraud, lying to the US Congress, and witness tampering was set free by his good friend, President Donald J. Trump.

Most people are required to obey laws and, if they are convicted of a serious crime, serve time – if the system doesn't kill them first – while the wealthy and well connected are too often set free, even when a court finds them guilty. The bankers who fueled the financial crisis of 2008 or stole from Malaysia's sovereign wealth fund have not faced any serious penalty, just as the super-rich and politically powerful have been able to set up shell companies in tax havens to avoid paying what they owe to the societies that disproportionately sustain, support, and

Prepare for a fight

protect them, the very societies which provided their massive, unreasonable wealth in the first place. It is the same thinking which has allowed companies like Shell and Exxon to lie about climate change for 40 years, while generating vast profits for their executives and shareholders from the destruction of ecosystems and the planet.

Chapter 7

System change not climate change

Without going deeply into the theory of systems change, if there is to be a relatively painless transition from the current system to a better one, two conditions need to be met.

First, the existing system needs to have lost widespread legitimacy and fallen into a crisis. Its failures must be obvious to a large number of people. (Condition 1: check.) With growing environmental problems, widening inequality, an unjust legal framework, and unsustainable levels of debt, the current system had lost much of its legitimacy even before the onset of Covid-19. Since the virus began its spread, the cracks in the system have widened. Many governments failed to protect their citizens' physical and financial health with some revealing themselves to be incompetent, uncaring, and violent, only interested in protecting wealthy interests. In the UK, Brazil, and US the needs of businesses were put before the lives of people.

Second, there needs to be an alternative system waiting in the wings, ready to take center stage. (Condition 2: pending.)

This is what those who want radical change need to focus on: the development of a framework for a different system which can be ready to deploy when the time is ripe. The framework for the new system does not have to be perfectly designed in every detail. It just needs to be sufficiently well conceived to be credible.

This approach to systems change has plenty of precedent, from the CIA-managed transition of President Sukarno to President Suharto in Indonesia in 1967, to some eastern European countries moving from Soviet administration to the European Union during the early 1990s, and China's *de facto* takeover of Hong Kong in 2020. The approach also has precedent in America

and Europe.

Following the Second World War, as Keynesian economic ideas became discredited, a group of neoliberal economists started work on the alternative system. In the late 1940s they formed the Mont Pelerin Society and with generous funding from corporations and wealthy individuals they developed an alternative approach to social and economic development. Over the following years, they spread their ideas and increased their influence by building networks at universities, through the creation of dedicated think tanks, and by publishing academic papers, news articles, and books.

Their chance for fame came in the late 1970s and early 1980s, when Margaret Thatcher was elected Prime Minister in the UK and Ronald Reagan became President in America. When these politicians looked for alternative ideas for managing societies, to make a break with the past, they were presented with the work of the Mont Pelerin economists, including Friedrich Hayek, Karl Popper, Ludwig von Mises, and Milton Friedman – some of the twentieth century's best-known economists.

Most of the leading economists in the Mont Pelerin Society are closely aligned to what is known as “the Austrian School of economics” because their families have roots in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Propaganda specialist Edward Louis Bernays, whose family also came from Austria, and who is better known as “the father of spin,” also played an important role in spreading Mont Pelerin thinking. He worked on redefining modern ideas of democracy to promote individualism, and undermine common ideas of social cohesion.¹⁶ Both concepts are central to Austrian School thinking. Originally, the term “Austrian School” was intended as an insult, because mainstream economists saw the ideas of this group as outcast, obscure and provincial. Despite this, they succeeded in having their approach widely adopted around the world.

It is the ideas of these economists which have dominated

social development thinking in most countries for nearly 40 years and which have led humanity into the dead end it finds itself today.

The Society's goal was to spread neoliberal thinking and what the group claimed were the "central values" of civilization. They wanted people to believe that government and the welfare state were dangerous, that each individual was sovereign, and that businesses should be minimally regulated. President Reagan's quip that the nine most dangerous words in the English language are "I'm from the government, and I'm here to help" was deliberately designed to undermine the role of the state and spread the apparent logic of these ideas.

Of Reagan's 76 economic advisers, 22 were members of the Mont Pelerin Society. Thatcher's chief economic adviser, as well as many other economists close to her, were members of the Society too.

For more than half a century, the Mont Pelerin Society has worked hard to make people's belief in the free market so normal that, like a religion, the underlying ideas are rarely questioned. As well as working to change the way economics is taught in universities and schools, the group has carefully built links to senior politicians, bankers, and journalists.

It was also behind the creation of the "the Sveriges Riksbank Prize in Economic Sciences in Memory of Alfred Nobel," more commonly known as the Nobel Prize in Economics, and which started in 1968. This is not a real Nobel Prize, like those for literature or science which date back to 1901. It is a public relations coup for free market economists, designed to legitimize neoliberal thinking.

The Society has also cleverly sought out intelligent people who are not economists, as secondary carriers of their ideas. With targeted articles, documentaries, and news reports to promote neoliberal free market thinking, many well-respected members of society have become inadvertent advocates of the

Mont Pelerin's work and enthusiastic supporters of the neoliberal system. Because they trust the lofty academic credentials of the Society's economists, and because they have not suffered from the system's many flaws personally, these people do not question the underlying assumptions or examine the outcome for the majority. The Society is also greatly responsible for "mathematizing" economics, to make the subject appear rigorously scientific and so give it greater intellectual credibility.

Despite the damage it has wrought, the Society provides a good model to follow. The work of this small group of economists shows how a new system can be defined, legitimized, and communicated. Unfortunately, the Mont Pelerin approach also carries two big warnings. First, it shows that it is possible for a small group of people to successfully promote a system of human development which is based entirely on self-serving, half-true ideas. Second, it shows that a system of human development does not have to deliver what it promises. In her excellent book about the modern history of neoliberal thinking and the role of the Mont Pelerin Society in creating the current economic system, Chien-yi Lu writes:

*Immeasurable amounts of time, energy, and talent have already been wasted on engaging [in] sincere debate with neoliberals as if they were honest theorists, thinkers, scholars, think-tank experts, or statesmen when actually, the core feature of neoliberalism is deceit.*¹⁷

Chien-yi Lu

If humanity is to slow the pace of climate change, the new system of development needs to be based on foundations that are robust, unlike those of neoliberal economics. It must also have clear operating parameters that are consistent with the achievement of the primary goal – to stop runaway global warming.