



Addressing Tipping Points for a Precarious Future

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Laurence Freeman, in his thoughtful chapter (5.1), makes the telling observation that ‘the “spiritual dimension” of a conversation is often placed at the end of a meeting with a full agenda’. We have heeded his playful comment and placed his contribution at the heart of this book.

We have done so because the architecture of the volume rests on the evolution from the dissection of the causes and outcomes of tipping points in Parts 1–4 to the scope for learning, forecasting and adapting to their onset in Parts 6–8. In harmony with Giles Foden, Laurence Freeman suggests that addressing tipping points offers immense scope for creative re-interpretation of our psyches and mind patterns. It is right that his ideas enter the complete discourse at this point in the volume. He asks pertinent questions of science, of contemplation, of deeper awarenesses, and of creative optimism. He offers the prospect of meeting in wholeness, of opening minds to other ideas and possibilities, and of sharing understanding so that fresh perspectives can be gained. He suggests that science can learn to be more humble in its moralizing, and in so being, it can gain more attention and respect. Without the bedrock of sustainability science, we have no firm platform on which to address tipping points.

Contemplative consciousness rests on silence, on meditation, and on joining up. It provides the kinds of purposeful judgements and confidence in proposed actions which any attempt to get to the transformational tipping points which dominate the contributions to come will require. The wonderful value of Freeman’s chapter lies in his presumption that we can think and act differently from where we have thought and acted until now. It is one aim of this volume to place into juxtaposition a range of perspectives from many patterns of thought and evidence, which release histories of imprisoned outlooks in favour of liberated reconnections. One (p.150) role for tipping points, no matter how irritating the notion is for many, is that they demand rethinking along with fresh ways of measuring and valuing actions and outcomes. Freeman offers us the insights which Foden initiated in what are delightfully complementary contributions.

David Atkinson, a former Bishop of Thetford, writes not just for Christianity (5.2). He proclaims that all faiths establish moral certainties for human occupancy of a self-perpetuating planet. These relate to ideals which, though rarely attainable and certainly not met, nevertheless guide our consciences and deeper behaviours. Many of the initiatives of sustainable localism which are

appearing all over the globe, even in the face of oppression and impoverishment, stem from the faith communities. Indeed many are sustained by faith and by the tenacity of recognizing that well-being and betterment have to be fought for and triumphed in the face of the many impediments of mindsets and institutions. If we are indeed to overcome the scourges of malign tipping points which currently beset both the planet and its human family, we will have to do so with faith, conviction, and compassion at our core.

These twin contributions offer the hope and the enlightenment that spirituality and transcendence can grant us, should we develop the antennae to sense them and the limbs to enact them. They also provide a springboard for the emergence of a sustainability science. This is the science of exploring, of dialogue, of learning and listening, and of partnerships and companionships. Sustainability science blossoms through the marriage of evidence and interpretation; of the capacity to 're-behave', beyond the confines of habit and social loyalties; and of the scope for reconnection and conviction with passion. Sustainability science grapples with wicked problems which cannot be solved without wholeness and stillness being part of their analysis. Sustainability science seeks the experience of experiments and trials, at all scales of human endeavour, so that companionships endure between partners who explore and share the same journey. The two contributions in this Part provide the intellectual and spiritual basis for the successful emergence of sustainability science, without which we doubt whether tipping points can ever fully and confidently be addressed.

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