

The Role of Values and Worldview in Societal Transitions: The Case of “After Capitalism” [pre-publication draft]

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Abstract

Too often the discussion of long-term societal change is situated in the context of today’s values and worldviews. Yet research from the World Values Survey and other sources suggest that there are discernable patterns in how values and worldviews are changing. Bringing that knowledge into our discussion and research about long-term societal change could help open up and shift the conversation to help see possibilities different from today. Additionally, we know from systems thinking that a key lever of systems change is influencing the paradigm -- i.e., the values and worldviews -- of the system. This paper will explore the potentially pivotal role of values in worldviews in a proposed societal transition to “after capitalism – a new socioeconomic operating system that succeeds capitalism.

Introduction: Why Values and After Capitalism

Two separate research streams come together in this paper. The first concerns the future of values and the more recent is on the future after capitalism (hereafter “After Capitalism”).

The values work emerged from a request -- “is there anything going on in consumer values” -- when I was an organizational futurist at Kellogg’s in the last 1990s. It led me down a path to the World Values Survey long headed by the now-deceased Ron Inglehart. It took some time to dig in and decipher this gold mine of longitudinal data about values shifts, but I came away with three values types: traditional, modern, and postmodern (I’d later add a fourth, integral, from the work of Don Beck with Spiral Dynamics). I used the types in my work with brands and product development at Kellogg’s and kept using them in subsequent consulting work with a wide range of clients in a wide range of sectors.

A year later in 2012, the topic of the next economic system was raised by then grad student Christopher Manfredi when I was an Adjunct Professor with the Houston Foresight program. We decided to make “After Capitalism” the focus of our Spring Gathering that year. I continued to follow the topic with some light scanning and reading for several years and eventually decided there was enough happening to capture in a book – which is now in the hands of a publisher.

Fit with this special issue

The After Capitalism research is being used here as a case study that fits with the special issue’s call to explore approaches “to the wicked and intractable problems which took decades if not centuries to reach their current entangled state.” I had observed the values connection to the After Capitalism research and saw a snug fit with the special issue’s call for “how might worldviews and value systems influence assumptions of change.” In this work, I lean heavily on Donella Meadow’s (1997) brilliant summation on how to influence systems change, which advocated action at the surface-level with metrics, at the deeper structural level with the rules of the system, and finally at the deepest and most influence level of influencing the paradigm, which is where the values and worldview shifts come in.

It is worth noting that values connection to After Capitalism is based largely on my analysis and interpretation. It is not coming directly or loudly from the literature. There is some discussion of values-related topics for sure, but the connection to the systemic changes needed for After Capitalism is not explicitly connected to values shifts. Most works focused on the technical aspects of the problem – the surface/metrics and structure/rules level of Meadows. They also mostly focus on how to fix or reform the existing system – how to save capitalism. Only a small sliver talk about a new system. This piece aims to make a beginning in addressing this gap.

Theory of Change

The special issue calls out “theory of change” as a topic to be explored, and rightly so. In the Houston Foresight program there is an entire class on social change (Bishop and Hines, 2012), which is also referred to as macrohistory (Galtung and Inayatullah, 1997). A key aspect of the theories most relevant to this work is how one views the direction of change: random, cyclical, or developmental:

- Random: there is no overall direction to change
- Cyclical: change in a recurring pattern — what goes around comes around
- Developmental: change in a consistent direction over time.

This work assumes developmental with its consistent direction of change over time, with caveats.

- First, Development is neutral on whether the change is good or bad. It is contrasted with Progress, Progress which assumes that the direction is a positive one. While not the focus here, the After Capitalism work engages a full range of outcomes, including the possibility of Collapse.
- Second, Development allows for some cyclicity — there can be steps backward, sideways, and forward, and iterations within the overall consistent direction.
- The third caveat recognizes that the developmental model may be guilty of over-simplification. The random concepts fit here. Futurist Zia Sardar’s (2010) post-normal times questions any model hinting at linearity and emphasizes interconnections amongst complexity, chaos, and contradictions. Development theory nonetheless takes the view that a development pattern can be discerned amidst the post-normality and that it provides a useful framework for exploring the long-term future.

It is not required that you adopt a development theory of social change, but that you can at least see it as a possibility. This is a great asset of futurists — the ability to embrace and understand an alternative view or alternative future, even when we may not believe it.

The Basic Argument about Values Shifts

Values are defined here as “an individual view about what is most important in life that guides decision-making and behavior.” Individual values are aggregated into the worldview types. The traditional worldview aggregates values about following the rules; the modern worldview aggregates values about achievement, the postmodern worldview aggregates values about the search for meaning, and the integral worldview aggregates values about making a difference. In practice, the worldview types are often referred to as values types, which is technically not correct but has proven more useful or common in practice, thus the reader’s indulgence is begged (Hines, 2011).

The four values/worldview types are below. Note that the rough percentages of the population holding those values come from a combination of the World Values Survey and Spiral Dynamics. Unfortunately, the data is in need of a fresh update. If the historical pattern holds of less than 1% a year of change, we should expect perhaps a 5-10% change in the estimates provided below.

People can and often do hold a mix of values from different types but typically have a primary orientation to a single type). Globally, several affluent countries, including Sweden, Finland, Norway, The Netherlands, Denmark, Iceland, New Zealand, Australia, Germany, Japan, and Canada, have lower percentages of traditional values and higher percentages of postmodern ones: (Hines, 2013; Inglehart, 2018)

- Traditional (@20-25%): The focus is on following the rules and fulfilling one’s predetermined role, with priorities such as respect for authority, religious faith, national pride, obedience, work ethic, large families with strong family ties, and a strict definition of good and evil. Traditional values are generally on the

decline as economic development has stimulated a shift to modern and then postmodern and integral values.

- **Modern (@40%):** The focus is on achievement, growth, and progress, with priorities such as high trust in science and technology as the engines of progress, faith in the state (bureaucratization), rejection of out-groups, an appreciation of hard work and money, and a determination to improve one's social and economic status. Rising levels of economic development that accompany modern values enable greater consumption and participation in consumer lifestyles. Modern values are slowing in affluent nations but rising in the emerging markets.
- **Postmodern (@25-30%):** The focus is on the search for meaning in one's life, with priorities such as self-expression, including an emphasis on individual responsibility as well as choice, imagination, tolerance, life balance and satisfaction, environmentalism, wellness, and leisure. This shift in priorities is enabled by higher degrees of economic security. This type emerged in the late 1960s/early 1970s and has been slowly growing since then to become an influential group shaping preferences in the affluent nations.
- **Integral (@2-5%):** This emerging type is characterized by a practical and functional approach to drawing upon values that best fit the particular context. The first three value types derive from the World Values Survey, but this one is derived from Integral Theory and Spiral Dynamics. Integral values are increasing but start from a much smaller base.

The pattern depicted in Figure 1 is a shift from left to right: from traditional to modern to postmodern to integral. Traditional values were once predominant, but eventually gave way to modern values, which are now the most prevalent type. But modern is giving way to postmodern, which will eventually give way to integral if the pattern holds.

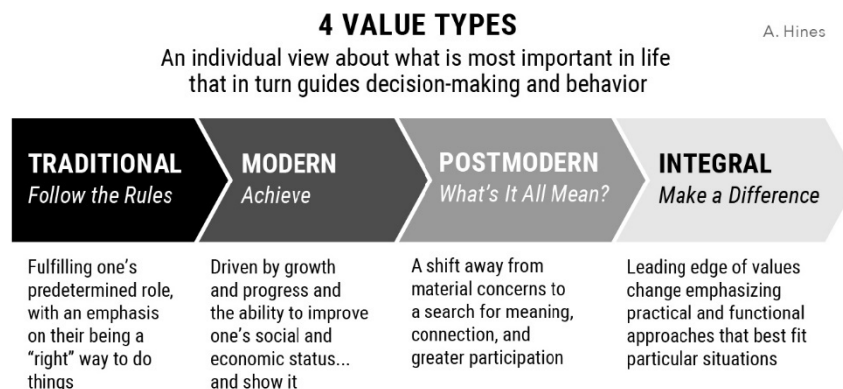


Figure 1. Four Values Types

One could argue that on a continuum from Capitalism to After Capitalism, the more postmodern countries tend to be further along with policies and development more compatible with the After Capitalism images than countries where modern or traditional values are more prevalent.

The Basic Argument of After Capitalism

I will again beg the readers indulgence in trying to summarize the relevant piece of the After Capitalism book in two paragraphs. The basic argument is that the currently dominant Neoliberal Capitalist system is disintegrating and is not likely to be saved, but rather its demise can at best be delayed. It is most likely going to be a long slow decline with a new After Capitalism system emerging alongside it, perhaps in 20-30 years. The reason for the disintegration is that capitalism fit well with the industrial revolution system that prioritized economic growth above all else. The current context is moving away from this system and emphasis toward a new context aimed at addressing problems such as inequality and the environmental issues of climate change and challenges to carrying capacity that resulted from the over-emphasis on growth. Thus capitalism is losing its fit. In values terms, the

modern “achieve” values that supported capitalism and the industrial revolution system have likely peaked and increasingly giving way to postmodern and integral values that fit better with the new emerging context. It should be noted that the After Capitalism images are presented a positive pathways based on values shifts, but there are other pathways possible.

My initial research found that there were indeed lots of ideas about what was wrong with capitalism, but much less about what might replace it. Given that one of the first books I read about the future was Polak’s (1973) masterpiece *The Image of the Future*, the stage was set to explore the possibility of identifying positive guiding images of the future that could replace capitalism. To sum up the state of affairs regarding After Capitalism:

- The important news is that we have no choice but to develop alternatives, because capitalism is dying.
- The bad news is that it is going to be a long, tough ride for at least the next several years, if not longer, and a “good” future is, by no means guaranteed.
- The good news is that there are indeed viable guiding images of life after capitalism.

I hope that supporters of capitalism can agree that is good futures practice to identify alternatives to any dominant system. In my view, despite flaws that any dominant system will have, capitalism fit well with the Industrial Revolution and did its job in producing economic growth (albeit unequally). I don’t see capitalism as evil or bad, but simply argue that it no longer fits well with the emerging future context.

The Relationship between Values and After Capitalism

The connection between value and societal transition to After Capitalism is laid out below in a chronological order. First, a brief history of values changes is laid out, which addresses the question of the “inevitability” of our wicked problem of capitalism by finding that current values systems, which may be perceived as inevitable in the present, do change over time. As the context changes, the values change with it. The modern values that fit well with capitalism are declining as the context for capitalism has shifted. The newer postmodern and integral values, however, are not yet strong enough to drive a shift to a new sociotechnical regime, thus there is a stalemate. Opposing values are held in roughly equal proportions, and neither side is willing to compromise. Thus we are stuck in a system, capitalism, that no longer fits with the current and emerging context, as we wait for the new values to gain strength.

Despite the stalemate, the values shifts are slowly proceeding, and the emerging shift featuring the advent of second-tier “no one-right-way” values portends a breakthrough of the stalemate.

History

Let’s start by putting the values in historical context in terms of how they fit with the prevailing economic system and its view of the future. Influential economist Robert Heilbroner (1996) talked about the view of the future in historical context. I added a column to connect that view of the future to relevant values type.

TIME PERIOD	VIEW OF THE FUTURE (HEILBRONER)	VALUES (MY ADD)
<u>The distant past</u> , 150,000 years ago to “yesterday”	Resignation	Traditional – follow the rules
<u>Yesterday</u> , 250 years ago (arrival of industrial revolution and capitalism)	Hopefulness	Modern – grow and achieve
<u>Today</u> (it was 1995)	Apprehension	Postmodern – what’s it all mean?
<u>The future</u>	—?—	Integral – make a difference

Figure 2. Views of the Future from the Past

The view of the future from the distant past had the common element of accepting one's lot in life and saying very little about change. It was focused primarily on the rewards or punishments of the next life. This fits with the traditional values type prevalent here in the sense of "follow the rules." One's job is to stay within their prescribed role and not rock the boat. There is a tight fit between resignation and traditional follow-the-rules values.

The view of the future shifts with the arrival of the industrial revolution and capitalism. Now the future is seen as a great beckoning prospect. It becomes possible to improve the human condition. The vision of the future shifts from the next life to this one. There is hope that if one works hard, they can change their role or position. In values terms, this mirrors the rise of modern values — in short "achieve." There is a shift from passive acceptance to actively shaping one's destiny. There is a strong fit between hopefulness and modern values.

The transition from "yesterday" to "today" leads to another shift in the view of the future to "a new degree of pessimism," which is dubbed apprehension. The tremendous dynamism and growth resulting from capitalism begins showing signs of trouble, like "a sorcerer who is no longer able to control the powers of the nether world whom he has called up by his spells." There is less certainty about capitalism being the right approach. This aligns with the postmodern values of a "search for meaning." The postmodernist, having achieved material success, still has an empty feeling (borne out by the data), and tries to figure out what can really make them happy. There is a strong fit between apprehension and the postmodern search for meaning.

In short, there have been values shifts in the past. A dominant type does not disappear, but simply becomes less prevalent as a new type that better fits with the existing context emerges. Indeed, all three values types are still present today. They are close enough in relative size to such that a stalemate has arisen. But first, let's address the inevitability question.

Inevitability

The relevant trope here is that it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism. This challenge aligns with the Special Issue's call to address "How might worldviews and value systems influence assumptions of change?" A central feature of the "capitalism is inevitable" argument is that it taps into the competitive instinct and relies on the "humans are wired to compete" (Diamandis 2012) or "survival of the fittest" assumptions. These are assumptions, however. The preceding section on the evolution of views of the future and prevalent values suggests that is indeed an evolution of views of the future and values over time. Sure, it seems dominant or inevitable in the present. Indeed, not everyone believes this today. Modern values emphasize competition, achievement, and victory — a perfect fit for capitalism, and are the largest values type in most nations today, thus it appears strong. The development direction indicates that they are slowly giving way to postmodern and eventually integral values.

These shifts away from modern values and capitalism are emerging. Bollier (2014), for instance, discusses the potential for cooperation, and raises questions about the inevitability of selfish humans maximizing their prospects at the expense of others. Eisler and Fry (2019) make a strong case that debunks the popular idea that people are hard-wired for domination, selfishness, or greed. They point out historical precedents for partnership approaches that emphasize empathy, equity, and caring. They argue that the dominator approach has simply become entrenched and reinforced in familial, educational, religious, political, and economic structures. In short, it can be "unentrenched" should we make that choice. There are many more.

An interesting question for further research is whether this "inevitability" is a feature of wicked problems, or whether it is unique to this case.

Current stalemate

Former Labor Secretary Robert Reich (2022) recently wrote about “Facing America’s Second Civil War” in which he sees a voluntary zip code split into blue (urban) and red areas (rural and exurban) rather than a shooting war. In short, the reds see anything they don’t like as an example of blue bias, and vice versa. From a values perspective, while the overlay is not 100% accurate, it is close enough to say that the reds are mostly traditional, and the blues are mostly postmoderns. Their percentages in the US are roughly equal, in the mid-20s (it is very difficult to pin down the precise numbers). The long-term trends favor the blues, as the postmodern cohort is growing and the traditional one is shrinking. The Moderns “in-between.” One might argue that there is also a fairly even split here: the “declining” industrial manufacturing base of the economy leans red and the “emerging” high-tech base leans blue. As an example, let’s say the construction industry leans red and cloud-based tech companies lean blue. Alas, there are enough exceptions to this rule to call this into question, as Musk, Tiel, and the “Tech Bro’s” among others seem to be leaning right (Griffith, 2024). And if you look at recent US election results as an example, they are evenly split as well! The long-term trends say they should be inching toward the postmoderns and integrals — but not enough to break the stalemate yet!

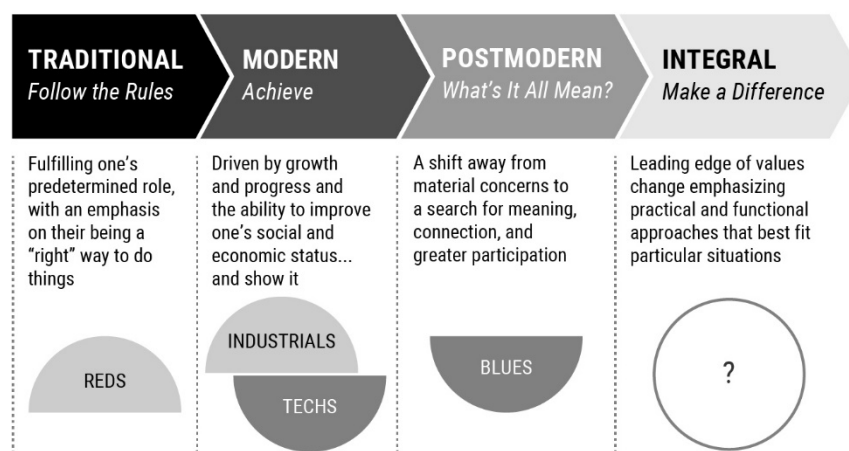


Figure 3. The Values Split

The emerging shift

The inputs or components of the guiding images of the After Capitalism future naturally clustered into three themes of being environmentally-, technologically-, or socio-politically driven. Not coincidentally, they each roughly aligned to a values type in terms of appeal. Those inclined to a particular values type tended to produce images of the future that aligned with their type. The postmoderns tended to produce environmentally-driven images as that fits with their priorities. The modern tended to produced tech-driven images as that fits with their priorities. Probably the least “neatly” fit is the traditional producing socially or politically driven images fitting with the class struggle ideas of the past. To be clear, this is not empirically tested, that is, the authors of the various concepts were not surveyed for their values types, but reasonable inferences can be made that the works produced seemed to fit with the various types on average. Those with Integral values will not tend to

necessarily favor any of the three types. A brief summary of the three images:



Figure 4. The After Capitalism Guiding Images

- Circular Commons. The Circular Commons image expands the concept of sustainability to embrace circular principles as part of a social, political, and economic commons. The circular qualifier denotes that the goods used in the present can be reused for the benefit of the future -- forming what the MacArthur Foundation defines as a “virtuous cycle of durables designed for re-use.” To succinctly summarize the key aim of a shift to a Circular Commons future is to cultivate environmental stewardship for the purpose of saving humanity from potential ecosystem collapse. (best fit with postmodern).
- Non-Workers Paradise. The Non-Workers Paradise image is a play on the attributed-to-Marxist idea of a worker’s paradise, but the world of After Capitalism has moved beyond the exchange of wage-labor for market access as a means of sustenance. A hallmark of this image is that the needs of economy have been subjugated to needs of society. One’s job is no longer the defining characteristic determining status in society and ability to access goods and services. The purpose, succinctly stated, is reducing inequality to creating a more just and fair society. (best fit with traditional).
- Tech-Led Abundance. The focus of the Tech-Led Abundance image centers on the potential for technological progress to drive the creation of an abundance of wealth that resolves the core distribution problem ingrained in capitalism. Goods and services, once reserved for the wealthy few, would now be available to all who need them. The aim of this image is to bring about a bountiful abundance that eradicates the world’s most pressing problems through sophisticated new technologies. (best fit with modern).

The differing emphasis and values appeals may increase the odds of their being accepted over time. In essence, there is something for everyone. The developmental direction of the values/worldviews approach suggests the postmoderns and integrals will grow stronger. However, my research suggests another ingredient or shift is necessary, the emergence of second-tier values.

The second tier

The section above suggests a gradual evolution may eventually shake loose the current stalemate between tradition, modern and postmodern. Morgan (2020) observed that the current values deadlock will likely persist until we apply new social organization tools that incorporate new values. He notes that “new values form as overall social complexity increases. . . Enter the Integrals, who are very small today but poised to emerge over the next few decades. Their emergence can be seen as a dynamic response to the increasingly complex changing conditions that

have been emerging. They are the first so-called second-tier values holders, according to the work of Beck and Cowan's (1996) *Spiral Dynamics*, which in short says that the traditional (Spiral blue), modern (Spiral orange), and postmodern (Spiral green) values are grouped as first tier. The defining characteristic of a first-tier value is that it asserts that its worldview is the right one – as noted above. Integral (Spiral yellow) is the first type of a second-tier level, with the key characteristic being that its proponents do not believe there is one right set of values for every situation. In short, they see the value of all values, and do not believe one type is best for everyone. So, first-tier values holders believe their way is the right way, and second-tier values adopt a more practical, functional fit-to-context approach. The challenge or even peril of first-tier values, is that people with different values can dig in and refuse to compromise – the current stalemate described above. A World Economic Forum piece observes that:

"political systems across the world are simultaneously experiencing deep disruption, with a startling escalation of polarization and tribalism ... across nations as diverse as the US, France, Germany, the UK, Italy, Hungary, Austria, Sweden, Poland, Brazil and the Philippines. In each of these countries we see similar patterns: public frustration with the status quo ... the division of groups into "us-vs-them", and political deadlock" (Dixon 2019).

Integrals, whose motto is to make a difference, will continue to grow and should bring a more open and tolerant perspective. A case can be made that as they grow more influential, they will increasingly drive the societal transition to After Capitalism. Srnicek and Williams (2016) are, in my view, spot-on in suggesting that what is needed is a worldview that integrates differences rather than trying to erase them, which fits perfectly with the integral perspective.

A question re: the Integrals what is critical mass — 10% 20%? 25%? Margaret Meade suggest that we not doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world, since it's the only thing that ever has." Nonetheless, I'm taking a conservative view and setting the *After Capitalism* Transformation as 20-30 years away is that this is probably how long the values shifts takes.

Values Change, like Wicked Problems Is Slow and Messy

Wicked problems are by definition slow and messy. It is tempting to suggest an elegant solution, but more likely is that resolving a messy problem will also be messy.

Slow

Values change is slow. Inglehart (2000) hypothesized that the post World War II period, in which advanced industrial societies attained much higher real-income levels and welfare states emerged, would enable values shifts. He tested and found postmodern values in the 1970s in Great Britain, France, West Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, and Belgium. In the US postmodern values emerged with the counterculture and Woodstock Generation of the 1960s and 1970s. Two generations later they are still only at around a quarter of the population — growing less than 1% a year. By the optimistic 2040 timeframe for *After Capitalism*, Postmoderns and Integrals should be at or over 40% of predominant values.

Messy

The World Values Data shows directionality in the aggregate from traditional to modern to postmodern. But there are starts, stops and turns along the way. Wars, recessions and other disruptive events can slow or even reverse the directionality for a period of time. Turns or detours can also emerge from the unhealthy expression of the values shifts. The values don't always shift in a –consistent direction. In fact, postmodern values are arguably experiencing a detour right now. Beck and Cowan (1996) note the potential for both health and unhealthy expressions of values. Granted, it is a subjective judgment about what constitutes healthy or unhealthy. Most tend to think of a healthy version of postmodern values as including self-expression benefitting the individual, community as leading to a

greater common bond, participation increasing buy-in, wellness as leading to a more holistic sense of health, and sustainability as improving the environment among other things. But they can also be expressed in an unhealthy way. Wilber (2003) explains how the “Mean Greens (our Postmoderns) take pluralistic relativism (everybody’s view is equally true) to an extreme and suggests that no idea or belief is better than any other. This can lead to a “no one is going to tell me what to do,” or “whatever I think is best” view. Rather than creating a community of togetherness, the world gets divided into good and bad, sensitive and insensitive, victims and victimizers. Some standard catch words of the green meme are pluralism, relativism, diversity, multiculturalism, deconstruction, anti-hierarchy, and so on. These are actually good things, but in the hands of the Mean Greens, they can lead to outcomes such as the politically correct thought police. It leads to taking moral superiority stances on everything – everyone should drive an electric vehicle, not use plastic bags, wear face masks – or they are publicly shamed. While one might see these stances as good things, the dogmatism creates a divisive us-against-them atmosphere that makes discussion, compromise, and agreement difficult. Over time, it is reasonable to expect this unhealthy expression to work itself out, but it will take some time.

Conclusion

Values and worldviews shifts are an important, maybe even the most important, part of resolving the wicked problem of moving beyond capitalism. As Meadows (1997) tells us, paradigm shifts are the most influential level of system change. But they are not a panacea. They must be accompanied by tangible shifts in rules/structures and metrics. The guiding images produced by the After Capitalism research provide a sense of direction for change, but they need to be translated into the nuts-and-bolts of how to activate and implement at the institutional and individual levels.

Let’s review the argument. The potential societal transition to After Capitalism is offered as a case example of a wicked problem. The current capitalism system is so wickedly entrenched that it is assumed to be inevitable and its supporting values hard-wired. The development values shift challenges this idea. Most of the work on the wicked problem will be focused on reforming the existing system. Alongside this is a smaller body of work looking at the potential for system change. While not explicitly focused on values shifts, my analysis suggests it is there. That data suggests a shift from today’s modern values toward postmodern and integral ones, which opens up the possibility of a paradigm shift that in turn brings in a societal transition. A key aspect of this shift is the emergence of the second-tier integral values, which are posited as a potential resolution for the “my values are the right ones” stalemate of today. Integral values see utility in all value types and seek the best situational fit. The challenge is that values change is, like wicked problems, are slow, messy and complex. Nonetheless, the After Capitalism research suggests a timeframe of two or three decades for this societal transition to play out. I believe the values shifts are perhaps the single most important factor to the **success** of a transition away from capitalism. Note that I bolded success – the values shifts are not driving the attention – climate change, tech acceleration, and inequality are doing that. But to be successful, values shifts seem essential.

At the core, the challenge is a paradigm one — we need to change values/worlds of the current system to create space for a new one. The key problem of the capitalist system with its modern values is that it produces growth that drives inequality and has created serious environmental issues. The emerging future context is looking for new approaches, and the emerging postmodern and integral values paradigms are poised to be a key enabler of the coming societal transition.

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