

The Traumatized Society: How to Outlaw Cheating and Save our Civilisation.

By Fred Harrison <http://www.fredharrison.com/>

Shepherd-Walwyn (Publishers) Ltd. <http://www.shepherd-walwyn.co.uk/>
ISBN- 13:978-0-85683-287-1

Many people are all too aware that there is something badly wrong with our current economic system, but they are less clear about how it got so bad, what an alternative might look like, and how we can make the change. This profound book admirably fills that gap.

In his 1997 book 'The Chaos Makers', Fred Harrison warned:

“By 2007 Britain and most of the other industrially advanced economies will be in the throes of frenzied activity in the land market...Land prices will be near their 18-year peak... on the verge of the collapse that will presage the global depression of 2010.

The two events will not be coincidental: the peak in land prices not merely signaling the looming recession, but being the primary cause of it.”

Such prescience is strikingly impressive, and demands that the author be taken very seriously.

Harrison maintains that humanity is the victim of a major crime which is both ancient and ongoing: the theft of the Commons by a small elite. Humanity has been suffering the consequences for countless generations. This is the cheating of the book's title. This cheating has been enshrined in laws and entrenched in thought over centuries, so that now it is so much a part of the way things are, we cannot even recognize it as cheating. We are forced to cheat too, if we wish to remain part of the society.

Starting with a fascinating look at the story of Cain and Abel, Harrison explains how Abel, a hunter-gatherer, lived a nomadic self-sufficient pastoral life, as humans had done for millennia. Cain had moved on to the next step, agriculture. He could produce a surplus which gave him an income, and this would eventually lead to what we recognize as urban civilisation.

But to make this possible, Cain had to erect fences to protect his crops from foraging animals. He took possession of the land, he asserted his right to private ownership. When the brothers presented their offerings to God, God was pleased with Abel's, but not with Cain's. In Harrison's interpretation, this was because Cain had appropriated to himself something that God had gifted to all. Perhaps he should have compensated those who lost out when he fenced off the land, or shared his produce more fairly. This drama has been played out again and again throughout history, as native peoples have been deprived of their ancient lands, and it continues as urban populations constantly fail to share equally in the prosperity made possible by ownership of what was once held as common, or by the actions of society .

As long as the earth was considered to belong to God, people felt they did not own it and had an obligation to share its benefits more equally. Hence the Biblical concept of Jubilee, whereby every 50 years debts were written off and land was redistributed, to prevent the unfair accumulation of wealth in fewer and fewer hands. Once God left the equation, the way was open for a free-for all, in which the strongest and most ruthless would emerge triumphant. The oppression, inequality and corruption we see around the world have been the inevitable result.

For those who do not believe in God, substitute the word Nature, and the message is the same. No human being created the earth, and therefore no human being is entitled to more than a fair share of its benefits. As Woody Guthrie sang, 'This Land is Our Land' and the sooner we realise that fact and act accordingly, the sooner we will heal our traumatised society.

But Harrison is not suggesting that we do away with the private ownership of land. What he believes is that when anyone deprives society of that which rightly belongs to all, or benefits disproportionately from the efforts of society, then society must be compensated, to ensure that all receive their fair share. As an example he cites the case of the Thatcher government, which invested £3.4billion in the construction of the Jubilee line. This public investment caused land and property values along the line to soar, so without lifting a finger a small group were enriched at public expense.

The author proposes a new concept of 'organic finance', in which all people and the environment are treated fairly and equally. He proposes amending the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights to include a clause which would restore our right to a share in the Earth, and our duty to compensate the community for what we take.

One means of achieving this would be a land tax. Lloyd George's 1909 budget proposed a tax on land and natural resources. Had it been implemented, it would have led to a new equality of economic opportunities, and a dismantling of the class structure. Predictably, the landowning aristocracy blocked it. Isn't it time we tried again?

What distinguishes this book from just another economic critique is its all-encompassing scope, informed by theology, psychology, sociology, to form a new discipline which Harrison calls sociogenics. Economics and current political structures got us into our current mess, and he believes they are incapable of getting us out. Governments are part of the problem, having evolved to think in ways which only equip them for maintaining the status quo.

I have only one minor criticism of the book, which may seem superficial. Its appearance is rather off-putting. The dull cover which lists chapter headings gives it the appearance of a dry textbook, when in fact it is a fascinating and very rewarding read. I would urge people to not judge the book by its cover: to do so would be to deprive themselves of ideas and wisdom which could transform the way they look at the world.

Bernadette Meaden