

The Dueling Loops of the Political Powerplace

March 2, 2008 ~ Jack Harich ~ Thwink.org

This paper presents seven hypotheses: (1) The crux of the environmental sustainability problem is not proper coupling, as is so commonly assumed. It is change resistance. (2) The root cause of change resistance lies in a fundamental structure called The Dueling Loops of the Political Powerplace. This consists of a race to the bottom among politicians battling against a race to the top. (3) Due to the inherent advantage of the race to the bottom, it is the dominant loop most of the time in most political systems. (4) Problem solvers have been pushing on an intuitively attractive but low leverage point. (5) An untried high leverage point exists. Pushing there would cause the race to the top to go dominant. This would solve the change resistance subproblem, thus changing the proper coupling subproblem from insolvable to solvable. (6) The Dueling Loops are cyclic. (7) The Dueling Loops are generic.

The purpose of this paper is to establish a new solution path to solving “a crisis more sudden, more global, more inescapable and more bewildering than any ever encountered by the human species.” (Ward, 1972) This is the global environmental sustainability problem. This path begins by first looking at the problem from the conventional viewpoint, and then from an unconventional one, which becomes our point of departure.

The Conventional Viewpoint

In 1972, the World3 model of *Limits to Growth* brought the environmental sustainability problem to the world’s attention, and defined the problem as how “to establish a condition of ecological and economic stability that is sustainable far into the future.” (Meadows et al. 1972) In other words, how can we properly couple the ecological and economic systems, by finding and implementing the right policies so as to keep impact at a sustainable level?

Proper coupling occurs when one system is properly coupled to another, using the appropriate feedback loops, so the two systems work together in harmony. In the environmental sustainability problem the human system is improperly coupled to the greater system it lives within, the environment.

The Conventional Perception of the Problem to Solve

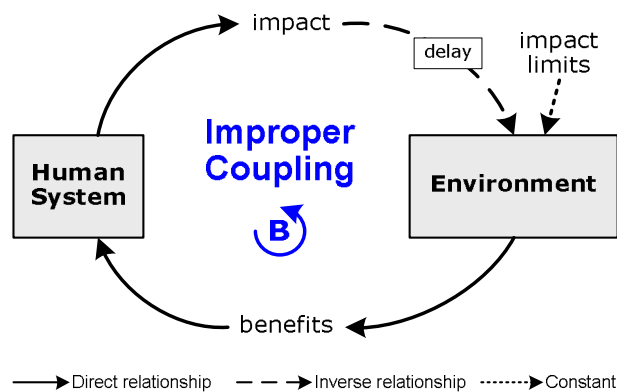


Figure 1 - How can we properly couple these two systems, so that as impact approaches the environment’s impact limits we can avoid overshoot? Presently the systems are improperly coupled and we are in about 23% overshoot. (Global Footprint Network, 2007)

The universal consensus is that how to achieve proper coupling is *the* problem to solve. The World3 model framed the debate this way. Subsequent analyses and dialog continued this perspective. In 1987 the United Nations' Brundtland Report stated that "*Our Common Future* serves notice that the time has come for a marriage of economy and ecology..." (World Commission 1987) In 1997 the nascent field of ecological economics argued that "three policies to achieve sustainability" are "a broad natural capital depletion tax, application of the precautionary polluter pays principle, and a system of ecological tariffs." (Costanza et al. 1997) These are proper coupling mechanisms. They attempt to internalize externalized costs, which itself is a proper coupling perspective. In 2007 an IPCC report stated that: "A wide variety of policies and instruments are available to governments to create the incentives for mitigation action. They include integrating climate policies in wider development policies, regulations and standards, taxes and charges, tradable permits, financial incentives, voluntary agreements, information instruments, and research, development and demonstration." (IPCC 2007) These too are proper coupling mechanisms.

Because proper coupling is seen as *the* problem to solve, finding and implementing the right coupling policies has become the *raison d'être* of the sustainability movement. But if we examine the total problematique from another perspective and decompose it differently, it's possible to come to a more productive conclusion, one that sees:

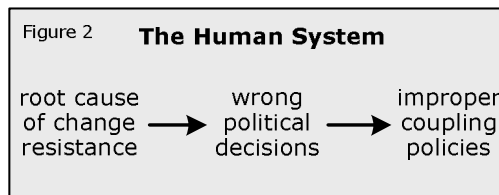
Change Resistance as the Crux of the Problem

The transformation of society to environmental sustainability requires three steps: The first is the profound realization we must make the change, because if we don't our descendants are doomed. The second is finding the proper practices that will allow living sustainably. The third step is adopting those practices.

Society has faltered on the third step. By now the world is aware it must live sustainably, which is the first step. There are countless practical, proven ways to do this, which is the *proper coupling* or technical side of the problem and the second step. But society doesn't want to take the final step and adopt these practices, which is the *change resistance* or social side of the problem. *Therefore change resistance is the crux of the problem.*

Figure 2 shows that to solve the crux of the problem, there is no need to model the environment at all. The root cause is endogenous to the human system. *Finding the root cause of change resistance and resolving it is where modelers should consider directing the bulk of their efforts.*

The Unconventional Perception of the Problem to Solve



Change resistance is the tendency for a system to resist change even when a surprisingly large amount of force is applied. Here's what the third

edition of *Limits to Growth* (Meadows et al. 2004) had to say about the phenomenon of change resistance, without ever using the term:

“[The second edition of *Limits to Growth*] was published in 1992, the year of the global summit on environment and development in Rio de Janeiro. The advent of the summit seemed to prove that global society had decided to deal seriously with the important environmental problems. But we now know that humanity failed to achieve the goals of Rio. The Rio plus 10 conference in Johannesburg in 2002 produced even less; it was almost paralyzed by a variety of ideological and economic disputes, [due to] the efforts of those pursuing their narrow national, corporate, or individual self-interests.

“...humanity has largely squandered the past 30 years...”

What is the underlying cause of such stiff, prolonged change resistance? Whatever it is, it must be incredibly strong to cause such a powerful effect.

The Race to the Bottom

There are two feedback loops in the human system that, in the large, affect citizen’s lives more than anything else. They are the loops that politicians use to gain supporters.

Over time, cultural evolution has pared the many strategies available for gaining political support into just two main types: the use of truth (**virtue**) and the use of falsehood and favoritism (**corruption**). For example, a virtuous politician may gain supporters by stating, “I know we can’t balance the budget any time soon, but I will form a panel of experts to determine what the best we can do is.” Meanwhile, a corrupt politician is garnering supporters by saying, “Economics is easy. You just put a firm hand on the tiller and go where you want to go. I can balance the budget in four years, despite what the experts are saying. They are just pundits. Don’t listen to them. A vote for me is a vote for a better future.” The corrupt politician is also saying to numerous special interest groups, “Yes, I can do that for you. No problem.” Guess who will usually win?

Falsehood and favoritism has long dominated political strategy. Most politicians use rhetoric, half truths, glittering generalities, the sin of omission, biased framing, and other types of deception to appeal to the greatest number of people possible for election or reelection. Politicians frequently use the *ad hominem* fallacy to attack and demonize their opponents, particularly as an election draws near. Once in office nearly all politicians engage in acts of favoritism, also known as patronage.

Politicians are forced to use corruption to gain supporters, because if they don’t they will lose out to those who do. This causes the **Race to the Bottom among Politicians** loop to appear, as shown in figure 3. Rather than show falsehood and favoritism, the model is simplified. It shows only falsehood.

A **meme** is a mental belief transmitted (replicated) from one mind to another. (Dawkins 1976) Memes are a very useful abstraction for understanding and modeling human behavior because memes replicate, mutate, and follow the law of survival of the fittest, just as genes do.

The lies and favors are a cunning blend of whatever it takes to gain supporters. Since lies and favors are unethical but work so well, corrupt politicians rapidly abandon the normal rules of ethics. This triggers an emergent super meme of “the end justifies the means” (not modeled) and can lead to horrific levels of unethical behavior, even in the most “civilized” countries.

Note that the more influence a politician has, the more falsehood they can afford to broadcast, and the greater the amount of favoritism they can plausibly promise and deliver.

The race to the bottom employs a dazzling array of deception strategies. These are usually combined, which increases their power. Here are four of the most popular:

False promise – A false promise is a promise that is made but never delivered, or never delivered fully. False promises are widely used to win the support of segments of the population, such as organized special interest groups, industries, and demographic groups like seniors or immigrants. False promises flow like wine during election season. The next time you see this happening, think of it as proof the race to the bottom exists, and as proof that few politicians can escape the pressure to join the race to the bottom.

False enemy – Creating a false enemy works because it evokes the instinctual fight or flight syndrome. The brain simply cannot resist becoming aroused when confronted with a possible enemy. False enemies are also known as scapegoats. They are used to divert the public’s attention from more important issues.

The two main types of false enemies are *false internal opponents* and *false external opponents*. Using examples from the United States, internal examples are negative campaigning, the Salem witch trials, and McCarthyism. External examples are communism, the second Iraq “war,” and lately Iran. While communism, Iraq, and Iran were true problems, they were trumped up enormously by the US administration to serve the role of a false enemy. Ironically, while the US was painting Iran as a false enemy, the government of Iran was doing the same thing with the US.

Pushing the fear hot button – When a politician talks about almost everything or the opposition in terms of terrorism, or communism, or crime, or threats to “national security” or “our way of life,” and so on, that politician is pushing the fear hot button. It’s easy to push. Just use a few of the right trigger words, throw in a dash of plausibility, and the subconsciousness is automatically hoodwinked into a state of fear, or at least into wondering if there is something out there *to* fear. Whether or not an enemy actually *is* out there doesn’t matter—what matters is that we think there *might* be one.

Fear clouds the judgment, making it all the harder to discern whether there really is an enemy out there. Because we cannot be sure, we play it safe and assume there is at least some risk. Since people are risk averse, the ploy works and we become believers. We have been influenced by statements of what *might* be lurking out there. Our fear hot button has been pushed and it worked.

“In politics, the emotions that really sway voters are hate, hope and fear or anxiety. But the skillful use of fear is unmatched in leading to enthusiasm for one candidate [*or one issue*] and causing voters to turn away from another.” (Westen, 2007. “or one issue” is my own comment.)

Wrong priority – Wrong priorities stem from hidden agendas. A **hidden agenda** is a plan or goal a politician must conceal from the public, due to an ulterior motive.

There are many ways a hidden agenda can come about. A politician may support a certain ideology, and so bends everything to support the goals of that ideology. Or he may have accepted donations and/or voter support from special interests, such as corporations, and therefore must promote their agenda. Or perhaps he had to cut a deal.

A politician with a hidden agenda must make the wrong priorities seem like the right ones in order to achieve what’s on the hidden agenda. How can he do this? For a corrupt politician such matters are child’s play—manipulate the public through false promises, create a false enemy, push the fear hot button hard and often, repeat the same lie over and over until it becomes “the truth,” and so forth.

The low priority that environmental sustainability receives from most governments today is rapidly becoming *the* textbook example of how devastating wrong priorities can be.

The Basic Dueling Loops

Opposing the race to the bottom is the race to the top. The two loops are joined together as shown. Because each loop competes for the same Not Infected Neutralists, they are “dueling loops.”

In the race to the top virtuous politicians compete for supporters on the basis of the truth, which is the true memes node. No favoritism is used, because those who tell the truth treat everyone equitably. Virtuous politicians

The Basic Structure of the Dueling Loops

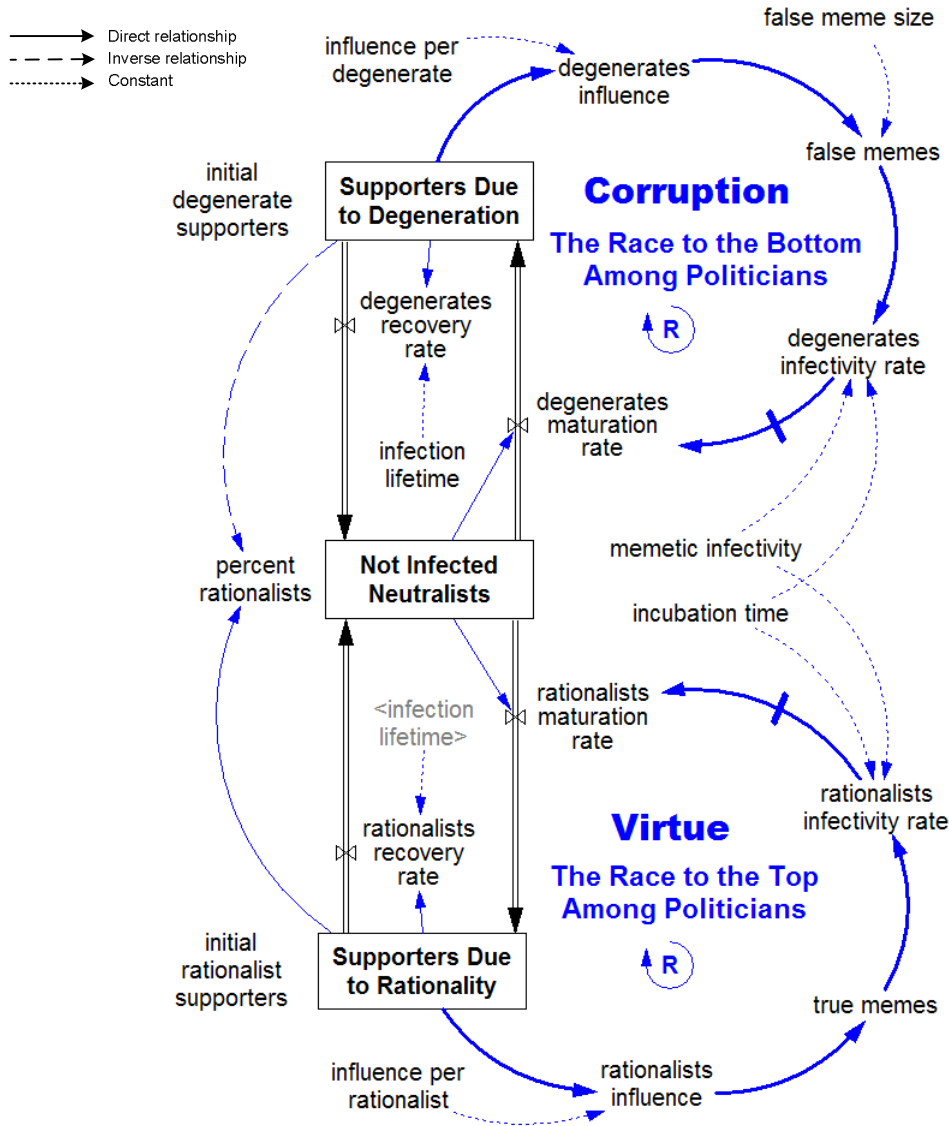
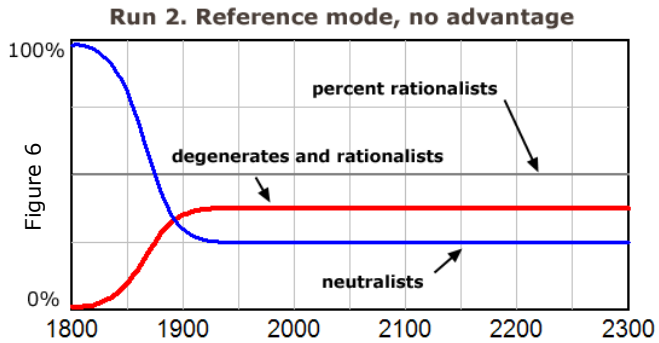


Figure 5. This is the basic structure of The Dueling Loops of the Political Powerplace. There are many variations. This structure, combined with agent selfishness, is the fundamental cause behind the behavior of all political systems, both ancient and modern. In particular this structure explains why corruption is what dominates politics, no matter how hard society tries to stamp it out. But once the structure is deeply understood it becomes possible to arrive at a way to eliminate corruption indefinitely. This is required to achieve sustainability of any kind, because **sustainable** is defined as the ability to continue a defined behavior indefinitely.

can help improve things so that society benefits as a whole, but they cannot promise or give anyone more than their fair share.

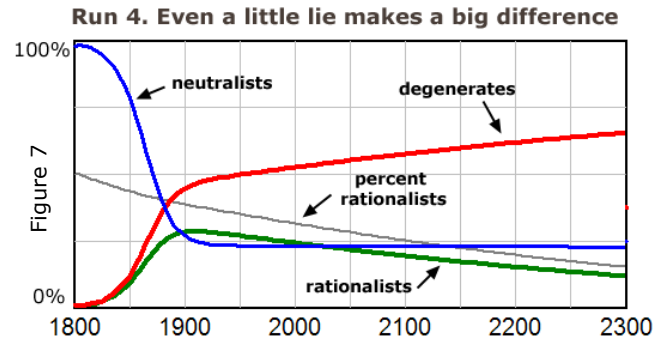
The race to the top works in a similar manner to the race to the bottom because the two loops are symmetrical, with one crucial difference: in the race to the top, the size of the truth cannot be inflated. Corrupt politicians can use false meme size to inflate the appeal of what they offer their supporters. But virtuous politicians cannot use falsehood to promise more than they can honestly expect to deliver. Nor can they use favoritism to inflate expectations of how well they can help particular supporters.

Run 2 - If we set false meme size to 1 and run the model, neither side has an advantage. The result is shown.



Run 4 - But if we set false meme size to 1.1 the results are much different: (The run numbers correspond to those used in a more detailed presentation of this model.)

The tiny advantage of 10% is the equivalent of itsy bitsy lies and favors that, it would seem, would not make much difference. But they do. Examples of fallacies related to the sustainability



problem are: (1) We can't be certain what's causing climate change, so we don't need to do anything about it. (2) We can't take action because solving the problem would wreck our economy. (3) We can't sign the Kyoto Protocol because it exempts developing countries.

The outstanding feature of the Dueling Loops structure is:

The Inherent Advantage of the Race to the Bottom

Because the size of falsehood and favoritism can be inflated and the truth cannot, the race to the bottom has an inherent structural advantage over the race to the top. A politician can tell a bigger lie, like budget deficits don't matter. But they cannot tell a bigger truth, such as I can balance the budget twice as well as my opponent, because once a budget is balanced, it cannot be balanced any better. From a mathematical perspective, the size (and hence the appeal) of a falsehood can be inflated by saying that $2 + 2 = 5$, or 7, or even 27, but the size of the truth can never be inflated to anything more than $2 + 2 = 4$.

For simplicity the model converts a size of 2 to 2 memes, a size of 3 to 3 memes, etc. But even if size was modeled in addition to the quantity of memes, the fundamental behavior of the model would be the same.

Because the size of falsehood and favoritism can be inflated and the truth cannot, corrupt politicians can attract more supporters for the same amount of effort. A corrupt politician can promise more, evoke false enemies more, push the fear hot button more, pursue wrong priorities more, and use more favoritism than a virtuous politician can. *The result is the race to the bottom is the dominant loop most of the time in most political systems.*

The Low Leverage Point

Due to cognitive bias toward seeing proper coupling as the problem to solve, combined with reliance on an intuitive, informal, traditional process so old and widespread it can be called Classic Activism, problem solvers have long been attracted to the low leverage point of pushing on "more of the truth." On the model this is the true memes node. Those pushing on this point employ the following implicit process:

1. Identify the problem.
2. Find the proper practices, if they are not yet known.
3. Tell the people the truth about the problem and the proper practices.
4. If that fails, exhort and inspire the people to support the proper practices.

The World2 and World3 models (Forrester 1971; Meadows et al. 1972) crystallized identification of the problem (step 1). More of the truth is discovered (step 2) by research on the proper practices to live more sustainably, such as population control, alternatives to fossil fuels, the three R's of reduce, reuse, and recycle, and tradable permits. More of the truth is then spread (Step 3) by scientific articles and reports, popular articles, environmental magazines, lobbying, pilot projects, lawsuits to enforce the legal truth, demonstrations to shock the public into seeing the real truth, and so on. If the truth is not accepted, then the rhetoric, arm twisting, wheeling and dealing, and inspiration is cranked up (Step 4). If that still fails, then steps 2, 3, and 4 are repeated in an effort to somehow do them better and harder.

The process works well on problems with low solution adoption resistance (low change resistance), such as local pollution and conservation parks. It occasionally works on medium change resistance problems, like stratospheric

ozone depletion. But it fails disastrously on problems with high change resistance, like climate change, global deforestation, and the abnormally high global species extinction rate, because environmentalists simply do not have the force (wealth, numbers, and influence) necessary to make pushing on this point a viable solution, due to the inherent advantage of the race to the bottom.

Why do people use low leverage points again and again?

“Social systems are inherently insensitive to most policy changes that people select in an effort to alter behavior. In fact, *a social system draws attention to the very points at which an attempt to intervene will fail*. Human experience, which has been developed from contact with simple systems, leads us to look close to the symptoms of trouble for a cause. But when we look, we are misled because the social system presents us with an apparent cause that is plausible according to the lessons we have learned from simple systems, although *this apparent cause is usually a coincident occurrence* that, like the trouble symptom itself, is being produced by the feedback loop dynamics of a larger system.” (Forrester 1971, italics added)

The Root Cause of Solution Failure

The Dueling Loops offer a clear explanation of why problem solvers have been unable to solve the sustainability problem. The root cause of 30 years of solution failure arises from these five preconditions:

1. The existence of the Dueling Loops structure.
2. The fact that for the same amount of effort, a politician can gain more supporters by corrupt behavior than virtuous behavior.
3. The presence of powerful special interest groups with strong motivations to support corrupt politicians in order to gain favoritism, notable for-profit corporations and the rich. In particular, the modern corporation is now so much more powerful than *Homo sapiens* it can be considered the New Dominant Life Form. (See for example Hartmann 2002; Nace 2003; and especially Korten 2001)
4. The mutually exclusive goals of special interest groups versus citizens in general. The goal of for-profit corporations is to maximize the net present value of profits. The goal of the rich is to stay rich and get richer, now. The goal of citizens in general, once their survival and security needs are met, is to maximize quality of life for themselves and their descendents.
5. The long displacement in time and space for the consequences of environmental impact (as well as solutions) to appear.

The emergent result is a dominant race to the bottom in too many political systems, which causes those systems to pursue the goals of their special interests. Since these goals are not advanced by solving the sustainability problem, that receives too a low priority to be solved proactively.

You can easily measure how dominant the race to the bottom is in your own political system. The greater the four main types of deception strategies and favoritism, the greater the dominance.

The High Leverage Point

We have good news. There is a promising high leverage point in the human system that has not yet been tried. It is general ability to detect political deception, as shown below on the revised model in figure 8. Pushing there appears to give problem solvers the greatest possible chance of solving the change resistance side of the problem.

The Two High Leverage Points of the Dueling Loops

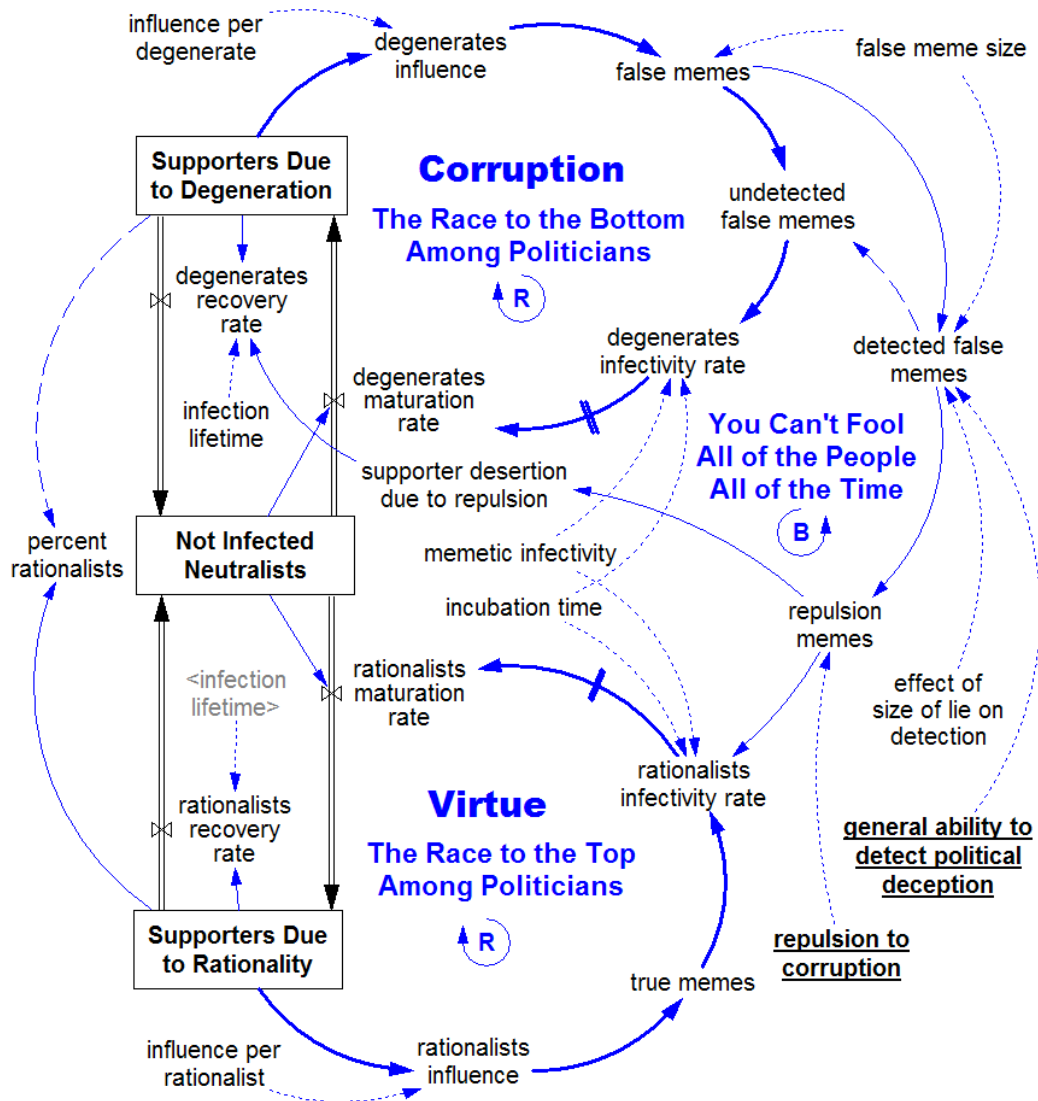


Figure 8. The two high leverage points (HLPs) are underlined. The one making the most difference by far is general ability to detect political deception. If the model is reasonably correct then pushing there can solve the change resistance side of the global environmental sustainability problem. Currently nearly all effort is directed toward the more intuitively attractive low leverage point of “more of the truth,” which is the true memes point. Pushing there fails, because environmentalists simply do not have enough force to *directly* overcome the inherent advantage of the race to the bottom. They can only overcome it *indirectly* by pushing elsewhere on high leverage points.

Actually the model identifies not one but two high leverage points. Both need their present values raised to solve the problem, but one has much more leverage than the other, and is the key high leverage point.

Currently general ability to detect political deception is low. The lower it is the lower detected false memes are. The lower that is, the higher undetected false memes are and the lower repulsion memes are. This causes more degenerates and fewer rationalists, which is bad news.

Currently repulsion to corruption is also low. The lower it is, the lower the rationalists infectivity rate and the lower supporter desertion due to repulsion. This is because repulsion to corruption times detected false memes equals repulsion memes. This makes sense, because detected corruption is a good reason to decide to support virtuous politicians and to desert corrupt ones.

For a system reaction to deception detection to occur, two steps must take place. The deception must be detected, which is handled by general ability to detect political deception times false memes equals detected false memes. Then those detected false memes must cause people to be repulsed enough by the corruption to either defect from the degenerates, which is what the supporter desertion due to repulsion variable does, or to become rationalists, which is handled by adding repulsion memes to true memes to calculate the rationalists infectivity rate. In addition to this, false memes minus detected false memes equals undetected false memes, which reduces degenerate infectivity.

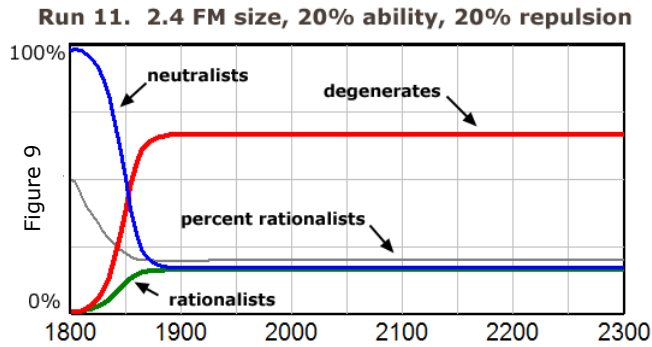
Currently the **You Can't Fool All of the People All of the Time** loop is so weak it might be more appropriately named **You Can Fool Most of the People Most of the Time**. Presently ability to detect deception is low, so corruption works like a charm, because most false memes flow through the system unimpeded. This causes undetected false memes to be high and detected false memes to be low, which strongly favors the race to the bottom.

But if problem solvers can raise ability to detect deception to a high level, most false memes flow to detected false memes. This greatly decreases undetected false memes, which destroys the power of the race to the bottom. At the same time this increases repulsion memes, which increases the rationalists infectivity rate and increases the degenerates recovery rate due to supporter desertion due to repulsion. The result is corruption doesn't work anymore, which causes the race to the bottom to suddenly collapse as most people see the real truth and flee for their lives to the stock of Supporters Due to Rationality. This is precisely what happens when massive amounts of corruption are suddenly exposed.

It is the effect of influencing so much so strongly that makes general ability to detect political deception such a potent high leverage point.

Run 11 - We estimate that presently, both high leverage points are low, about 20%. Given this, the optimum strategy for the degenerates to maximize success is to use a false meme size of 2.4. The results are shown:

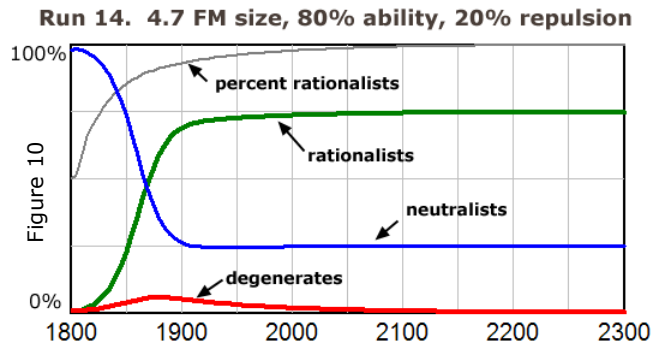
The rationalists get trounced. This run represents how badly environmentalists are losing to the opposition, which is mainly corporate special interests and their allies, such as the rich and the media.



A false meme size of 2.4 may sound ridiculously high, but consider for example the recent change resistance behavior of the George W. Bush administration in the US. Using a wide variety of clever lies and rationalizations, until recently it argued climate change was not anthropogenic. Now it agrees it probably is, but all that's necessary to solve the problem is voluntary emission limits, which of course will work no better than a voluntary income tax. The Bush administration has also engaged in massive deception to promote wrong priorities, false enemies, and pushing the fear hot button, such as the Iraq war and the so called war on terrorism. It has also employed the false promise form of deception, as when Bush promised while campaigning that he would regulate CO2 emissions, but reversed this after election. Similar examples could be found in many other political systems.

Run 14 – Let's push on the high leverage point of general ability to detect political deception by raising it from 20% to 80%.

The results show this is enough to cause the race to the top to go totally dominant, even with the new optimum false meme size of 4.7. Increasing the other high leverage point, repulsion to corruption, has much less effect.



The system has flipped into a new mode. Because the race to the top has become the dominant loop, the human system will now want to solve the sustainability problem just as strongly as it did not want to solve it before.

This scenario represents overcoming change resistance. *Once that occurs, solving the proper coupling part of the sustainability problem will be an order of magnitude easier than it is today, because politicians will be competing to see who can provide the best solution to society's top problems.* This

will have the rather welcome effect of changing the proper coupling problem from insolvable to solvable.

Once this mode is reached it will hardly matter what the exact proper coupling mechanisms are. Any number will do, because the system now “wants” to be properly coupled.

Cyclic Behavior

Up until now the model has ignored consideration of what it is that causes a society to decide to raise its general ability to detect political deception and/or repulsion to corruption. To raise the values for these two variables in our simulation runs, all we had to do was reach into the model and change them. That is not how it happens in the real world. How then do societies adjust these values?

My hypothesis is that societies reactively change these values when they see a clear and present need. This appears when a prolonged excess of corruption occurs. Because there is no formal reliable mechanism to keep the values of these two variables permanently high, they tend to fluctuate as the decades pass. Another way to say this is societies have a short organizational memory on what the values of these two variables should be.

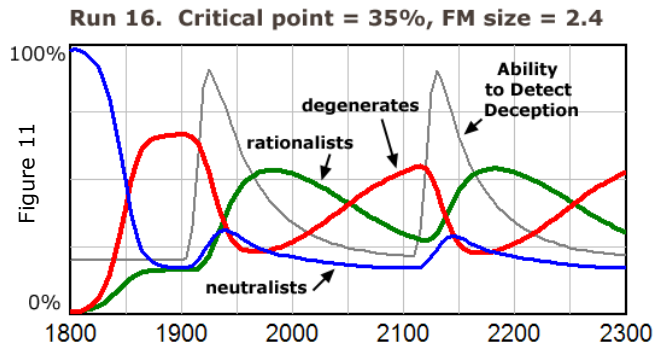
Reactively changing these values causes an endless series of cycles. A cycle ends when corruption becomes so extreme and obvious that the people rise up, throw the bums out, and become much harder to deceive/exploit for awhile. But as good times return, people become lax, and another cycle begins. These cycles never end, because presently there is no mechanism in the human system to keep ability to detect deception permanently high.

The minimum conditions required for the dueling loops to be cyclic appear to be:

1. The natural tendency for general ability to detect political deception and repulsion to corruption to be low.
2. The existence of critical points that are automatically activated when corruption gets bad enough. Once a critical point is activated, society invests in raising general ability to detect political deception and/or repulsion to corruption.
3. The critical point is deactivated once corruption falls low enough. This is because there is no permanent mechanism to keep these variables high enough to prevent corruption. (Maxims like “The price of democracy is eternal vigilance” intuitively recognize the need for a permanent mechanism, but even 1,000 such maxims are not enough. Something more is needed.)
4. The presence of delays in raising and lowering the two high leverage points, and in changing supporters of one type into another.

Run 16 – By adding a critical point subsystem to the model embodying these conditions and setting the critical point to 35%, the model will automatically raise general ability to detect political deception when the critical point (percent rationalists) falls below 35%. The results show how cyclic the cultural norm of reactively solving one bout of corruption after another can be. Here the optimum false meme size is 2.4.

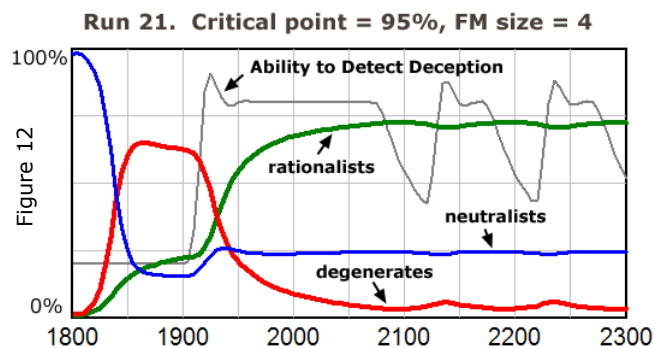
Thus the natural tendency of the dueling loops is to be cyclic. The length of the cycles varies greatly, depending on a host of factors, only a few of which are incorporated in the



model. Because there are many corrupt politicians and special interest groups trying to exploit the race to the bottom, there are many cycles underway at the same time. A political system will be characterized by whichever cycles are currently dominant and by how strong and clever the various exploiters are.

Run 21 – The lesson to draw from run 16 is society will be too distracted and weak (in terms of ability to make proper decisions) to solve major problems unless it reacts to corruption *proactively* instead of reactively. A proactive mode can be simulated with a high critical point of 95% and an optimum false meme size of 4:

The cyclic behavior is nearly completely gone, and the race to the top is strongly dominant indefinitely. This run represents the conditions required for political systems to be able to reliably solve difficult social problems like sustainability.



Two Sample Solution Elements

If experimentation proves the assumptions in the model to be correct, then we have found the root cause of inability to solve the sustainability problem and a high leverage point capable of resolving the root cause. To go from theory to application we next need to answer this question: How can we push on the high leverage point in order to begin to make scenario 21 happen?

Below are two sample solution elements illustrating practical ways to do this. Both work by strengthening existing feedback loops.

Credit ratings quantify the creditworthiness of a person, organization, or government. Product ratings, such as those in Consumer Reports magazine, quantify the worthiness of products. Both are widely used.

Truth ratings would quantify the truthfulness of important political arguments. A Truth Rating is the probability an argument is true. They work by rating the truth of important statements made by politicians. For example a few days after a presidential debate, its truth ratings would come out. They might say that candidate A averaged 45% true, while candidate B averaged 70%. Guess which candidate would probably win the debate in the public's mind?

If the organization doing the rating was credible and the public trusted the truth ratings, a race to the top would begin. Politicians would compete to see who could be the most truthful in the fullest sense of the word, and therefore the most helpful. Campaigns would become based on reason and truth rather than rhetoric, falsehood, favoritism, and charisma. Due to a trickle down effect from the successful use of Truth Ratings, a race to the top would also begin in other areas of society where less than the truth has long prevailed, such as advertising, editorials, and the billions of conversations that go on everyday as people struggle to reason forward to what they should do.

No one person can become an expert on the many critical issues of our day and spend hundreds and sometimes thousands of hours analyzing each important political argument they encounter. Instead of individuals continuing this impossible task, certified independent rating organizations would do it. These organizations would quantify the truthfulness of important political arguments and provide a written rationale for each rating, so that the public could make its own final judgment.

However, the truth of political arguments is not the only behavior that needs to be rated in order to strengthen the voter feedback loop. The overall corruption of politicians must also be rated. This is done with **Corruption Ratings**, which are an overall measure of how corrupt a politician is. Corruption includes falsehood, favoritism, coercion, abuse, criminal activity, the giving or accepting of bribes, knowledge that corruption is going on, and so on.

A major component of a politician's Corruption Ratings is Truth Ratings. This would account for about 40% of the rating. As a politician's Truth Ratings go up, his or her Corruption Rating would go down.

Corruption Ratings would need to be done regularly, perhaps every two years. The running average of the last ten years or so would be a politician's rating. Corruption Ratings would become as routine and cost about as much as a high level security check.

Truth Ratings and Corruption Ratings are examples of **politician ratings**. Politician ratings need not affect all voters to make the critical difference—only the swing voters. Fortunately it is this group who is most likely to be receptive to a tangible, sound reason to choose one politician over another.

The Analogy of Credit Ratings

Politician ratings are analogous to credit ratings. To demonstrate how important credit ratings have become in just one area, the corporate bond market, below is an excerpt from testimony presented to the US Senate on March 20, 2002, to the Committee on Governmental Affairs, chaired by Senator Joe Lieberman: (US Senate 2002, italics added)

“Simply put, a credit rating is an assessment of a company’s credit worthiness or its likelihood of repaying its debt.

“John Moody, the founder of what is now Moody’s Investors Service, is recognized for devising credit ratings in 1908 for public debt issues, mostly railroad bond issues. Moody’s credit ratings, first published in 1909, met a need for *accurate, impartial, and independent information*.

“Now, almost a century later, an ‘investment grade’ credit rating has become an absolute necessity for any company that wants to tap the resources of the capital markets. The credit raters hold the key to capital and liquidity, the lifeblood of corporate America and of our capitalist economy. The rating affects a company’s ability to borrow money; it affects whether a pension fund or a money market fund can invest in a company’s bonds; and it affects stock price. *The difference between a good rating and a poor rating can be the difference between success and failure, prosperity and bad fortune.*”

In a similar manner, the difference between a good politician rating and a poor one would be the difference between success and failure for politicians, and prosperity and bad fortune for the public.

But even more interesting is the testimony went on to say:

“The government - through hundreds of laws and regulations - *requires corporate bonds to be rated* if they’re to be considered appropriate investments for many institutional investors.”

So too would the government require politicians to be rated if they were to be considered appropriate investments for many citizens. Credit ratings greatly lower the risk of financial loss. Corruption Ratings would greatly lower the risk of corruption. If they proved as successful as credit ratings, they would lower it by somewhere around 99%, which would make sizeable cases of corruption about as frequent as Halley’s Comet.

Politician ratings have started to spontaneously appear, like FactCheck.org, which “aims to reduce the level of deception and confusion in U.S. politics. We monitor the factual accuracy of what is said by major U.S. political players.” (FactCheck.org 2007) But these efforts are not comprehensive and high leverage point oriented enough to make a significant difference.

Summary of Key Insights

Simplifying enormously, conventional wisdom says all we need to do to solve the sustainability problem is to find the proper practices needed to live sustainably and then aggressively promote those practices until they are adopted. This proper coupling or “technical side” of the problem approach has tremendous logical and technical appeal. The rationale runs about like this: “Solving the problem is basically a matter of finding out what's best for the good of all, and then spreading that knowledge. Once people and governments see what's in their own best interests, they will start doing things that way, because people are rational.”

There is, however, a slight drawback to this approach. It doesn't work.

This is because it completely misses the change resistance or “social side” of the problem, and fails to consider the hidden social structure containing the root cause of decades of solution failure. If problem solvers would focus their efforts on why so much change resistance is occurring they might find, as this analysis has, that all they've been doing is engaging in “more of the truth.” This is a low leverage point. *Pushing on this point fails because it is no more than a heavy handed, naive attempt to make the race to the top go dominant through the application of brute force.* It does not consider that the race to the bottom is inherently stronger and has a more powerful special interest group behind it.

Fortunately there is at least one viable alternative: the high leverage point of general ability to detect political deception. Currently this is low. If problem solvers can raise it to a high level the race to the bottom will collapse and the race to the top will go dominant. *Politicians will then respond correctly to the truth about the global environmental sustainability problem because it will now be in their best interests.* If they come to the same conclusion that environmentalists have, that environmental sustainability is civilization's top priority and nothing else comes close, and we can make the race to top go dominant in the most influential countries and eventually all of them, then civilization will at long last enter the Age of Transition to Sustainability.

Further analysis and much experimentation will be necessary to refine the concept model and more precisely determine where the high leverage points are and how to best push on them. Memetic calibration may be necessary. Flaws may be discovered that must be addressed. Additional factors that matter significantly may appear. The model and solution elements presented here should not be interpreted as *the* analysis or *the* solution, but as *a path to a solution*. The thesis of this path is that it's possible to reengineer the design of the human system so that it naturally “wants” to solve the sustainability problem, using the right problem solving process and the right tools.

Lastly, *the Dueling Loops are generic*. They apply to far more than the environmental sustainability problem. They apply to any problem whose solution would benefit the common good and whose cause is mainly exploitation of the race to the bottom. Thus a dominant race to the top opens the door to resolving a number of social problems that have long defied solution, including systemic poverty, excessive variation in distribution of wealth, war and other types of conflict, and how to achieve deep, lasting global cooperation. The last is itself required for global sustainability of any kind.

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