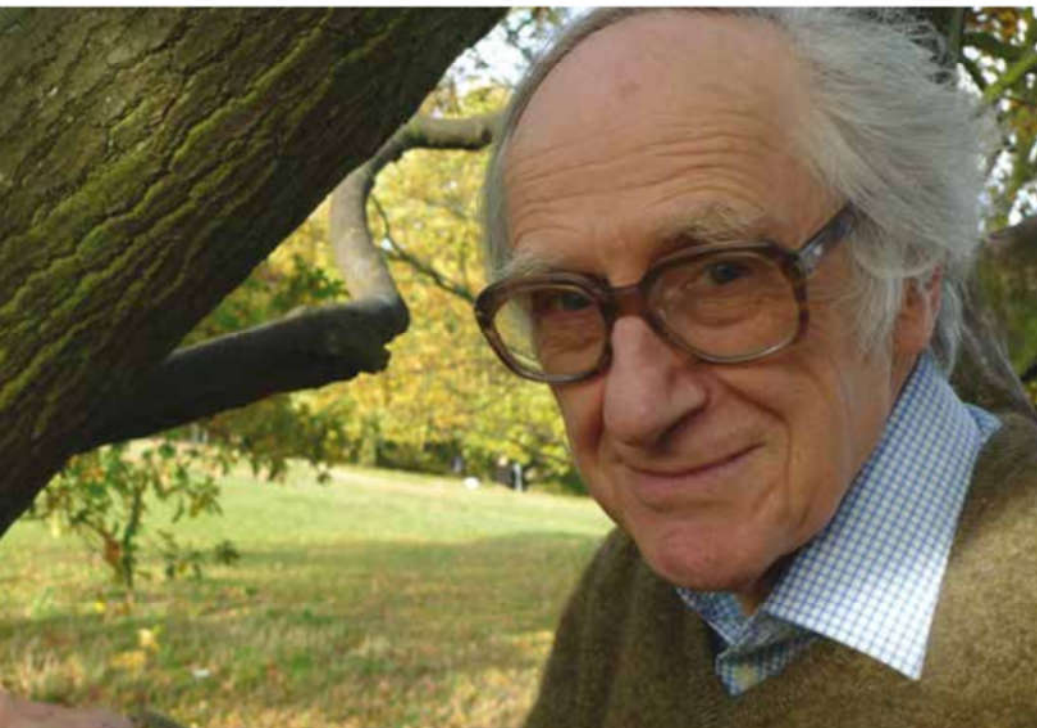


## Lean Logic: surviving the future

*Lean Logic* by David Fleming is a tour de force, providing an astute analysis of how we got to where we are today and providing a vision for how we might create a more resilient society. Fleming's long-time collaborator **Shaun Chamberlin** gives us a fascinating glimpse into the man and his work.



**D**r. David Fleming (1940-2010) was a visionary thinker and writer who played significant roles in the genesis of the UK Green Party, the Transition Towns movement and the New Economics Foundation, as well as chairing the Soil Association. He was also one of the early whistle-blowers on oil depletion and designer of the influential TEQs carbon/energy rationing system. He read Modern History at Trinity College, Oxford, and later earned an MBA and then an MSc and PhD in economics (in 1988). These enabled him to better engage with and confound the mainstream, in support of his true passion and genius: understanding that diverse and mysterious thing "community." He taught at CAT, and *Lean Logic* was the work of over 30 years.

### From despair to optimism

A dictionary unlike any other, *Lean Logic* leads readers through Fleming's stimulating exploration of fields as diverse as culture, history, science, art, logic, ethics, myth, economics and anthropology, being made

up of four hundred and four engaging essay-entries covering topics such as Boredom, Community, Debt, Growth, Harmless Lunatics, Land, Lean Thinking, Nanotechnology, Play, Religion, Spirit, Trust and Utopia.

Fleming acknowledges, with honesty, the challenges ahead, but rather than inducing despair, *Lean Logic* is rare in its ability to inspire optimism in the creativity and intelligence of humans to nurse our ecology back to health; to rediscover the importance of place and play, of reciprocity and resilience, and of community and culture.

### Extracts from *Lean Logic*

*Extensive references are given in the dictionary itself, but are omitted here – they are available on request. \* Asterisks point to other entries in the dictionary.*

**Death.** The means by which an ecosystem keeps itself alive, selects its fittest, controls its \*scale, gives peace to the tormented, enables young life, and accumulates a \*grammar of inherited meaning as

generations change places. A natural system lies in tension between life and death: death is as important to it as life. *A lot of death* is a sign of a healthy large population. *Too much death* is a sign that it is in danger; it is not coping; its terms of coexistence with its habitat are breaking down. *Too little death* is a sign of the population exploding to levels which will destroy it and the ecology that supports it. *No death* means that the system is already dead.

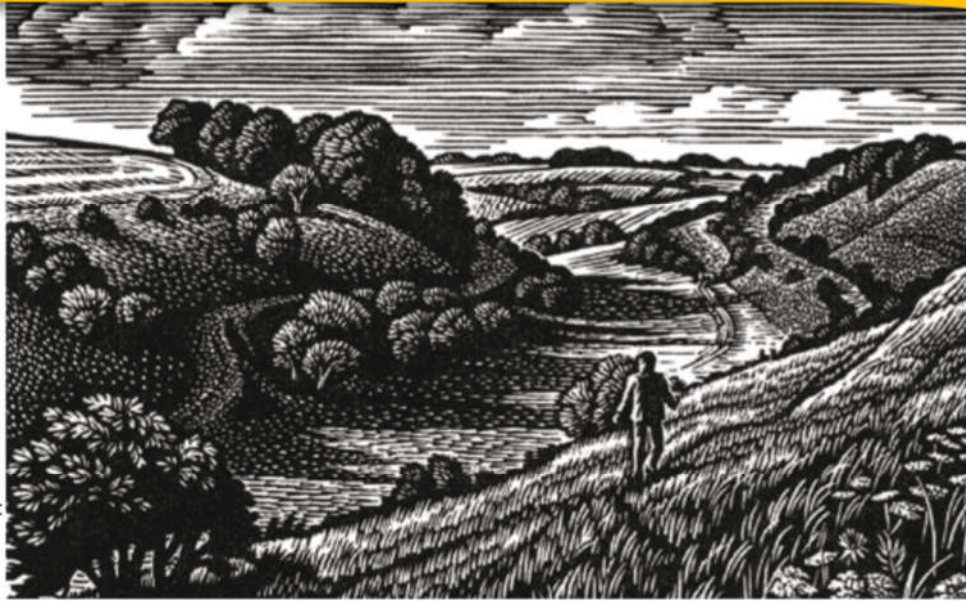
The reduction of life to an \*icon – the assertion that life (*viz*, human life) is sacred – disconnects the mind from the ecosystem to which it belongs. It is a fertile error. Beneath the exaggerated regard for life lies an impatience with, a disdain for, the actual processes that sustain the \*ecology that sustains us. Expressing faith in the sanctity of human life is a license – in a series of little, well-intentioned, \*self-evident steps – to kill the ecology that supports it. The large scale system, relying on its size and technology, and making an enemy of death which should be its friend, joins a battle which it cannot win. In \*systems thinking, death is sacred.

**Indignation, The Fallacy of.** Indignation is an urban emotion: it looks for action to be taken by someone else; it believes that the way forward is agitation; and it \*begs the question: if you are indignant about something, it has to be an outrage, and caused by someone other than you – otherwise, of course, you wouldn't be indignant, would you? And it is urban in the sense that, in the city, it is easy to get away, so you can absent yourself from a \*conversation, indignantly telling the other person you find his views repugnant. You won't be needing to borrow his horse.

Out of town, it is different. It is a waste of time being indignant in a field of buttercups. You have to see to it yourself. That may involve time in a circumstance not of your choosing, in a conversation not on your terms.

See also: \*Anger; \*Blame; \*Empowerment; \*Unmentionable, The Fallacy of.





Howard Phipps

**Localisation.** Localisation stands, at best, at the limits of practical possibility, but it has the decisive argument in its favour that there will be no alternative.

**Needs and Wants.** A distinction between needs and wants has been made by many critics in the \*green movement and its predecessors, who have argued that consumption in response to our needs is justifiable and \*sustainable, but consumption in response to our wants is not.

Yet this notion that needs are good and wants bad does not survive inspection. For the anthropologists Douglas and Isherwood, it is a "curious moral split [that] appears under the surface of most economists' thoughts on human needs". *Lean Logic* argues that those economists have it somewhat back-to-front.

The heaviest burden of the modern \*economy, by far, is that imposed by its own elaborations. Any large-scale economy requires massive infrastructures and material flows just to support itself and keep existing. Such sprawling industrial

economies have massively multiplied our needs, our \*\*regrettable necessities'. Regardless of whether we want them, we *need* the sewage systems, heavy-goods transport, police forces... Given the substantial scale of the task of feeding, raising and schooling a suburban family, and the increasing challenge of such routine needs as finding a post office, many of us undoubtedly need cars. The collapse of local self-reliance was both the cause and the effect of the massive elaboration of \*transport, and when that need can no longer be met, its life-sustaining function will be bitterly recognised.

It is, then, the elaboration of needs by large-scale industrial life that causes the trouble. Our *wants* are squeezed-out, much-missed and light by comparison, not least because they often involve labour-intensive \*crafts and services – pianists, craftsmen, dress-makers, waitresses, gardeners with minimum environmental impact. Some wants are also needs, of course, and they cannot be cleanly separated, but if we focus our efforts on finding a way, under the stresses of the \*climacteric, of achieving a substantial and rapid liquidation of our needs, we will be getting somewhere.

See also: \*Growth, \*Intentional Waste, \*Invisible Goods, \*Lean Economics, \*Scale, \*Slack

**Peasant.** A person practicing small-scale, mixed, energy-efficient, fertility-conserving farming designed chiefly for local subsistence. It is integrated into local \*culture. It is the defining practice of the \*community. This model of farming, however, became briefly obsolete in the \*market economy, with its abundant cheap \*energy, enabling a different one to develop which did not need to supply its own energy and sustain its own fertility.

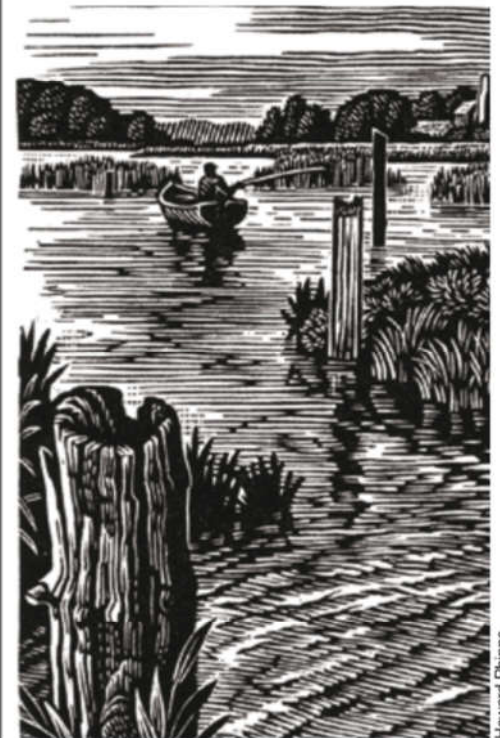
Peasant farming is a skilled and efficient way of sustaining \*food production within the limits of the \*ecology. It is an eco-ethic, sustaining the measured synergy with nature that we find in \*Tao philosophy. It has the five properties of \*resilience.

But it has a flaw. It is highly productive, so it yields a surplus, and this is a tempting resource for the gradual evolution of an urban civic society, with its unstoppable implications of \*growth, hubris and trouble. Is there a way of learning from that dismal cycle, and sustaining, instead, a localised, community-based, decentralised society, without the seeds of its own destruction...?

**Place.** Space whose local narrative can still be heard, and could be heard again, given the chance. Place is the practical, located, tangible, bounded setting which protects us from \*abstractions, \*generalities and \*ideologies and opens the way to thinking as discovery. On this scale, there is \*elegance, and some relief from the need to be right, for if you are wrong, the small \*scale of place allows for revision and repair, supported by \*conversation.

Place is the endangered habitat of our species.

See also: \*County, \*Harmless Lunatic, \*Home, \*Identity, \*Localisation, \*Parish, \*Practice, \*Proximity Principle, \*Regrettable Necessities, \*Scale, \*Transition



Howard Phipps



Andy English



**Relative Intelligence.** Failure to account for the match between mental capacity and the problems that have to be solved.

As society becomes more complex, the relative intelligence of *homo sapiens* declines, leaving us on a lower Relative Intelligence Quotient (RIQ) than a swan, or a beetle.

**System-Scale Rule.** The key rule governing systems-design: large-scale problems do not require large-scale solutions; they require small-scale solutions within a large-scale framework.



Sue Scullard

**Transformation, The Great.** The Great Transformation has already happened. It was the revolution in politics, economics and society that came with the \*market economy, and which hit its stride in Britain in the late eighteenth century. Most of human history had been bred, fed and watered by another sort of economy, but the market has replaced, as far as possible, the \*social capital of \*reciprocal obligation, \*loyalties, authority structures, \*culture and \*traditions with exchange, price and the impersonal principles of \*economics.

Unfortunately, the critics of economics have had a tendency to discuss the whole structure as a tissue of misconceptions. It is a critique that fails. The strength of economics is its considerable, if far from complete, understanding of the flows and comparative advantages that underlie trade, jobs, \*capital and incomes, and the logic of optimising behaviour, all backed by glittering accomplishment in mathematics. That makes it a powerful analytical instrument, so that just a few misconceptions – such as a failure to understand the \*informal economy or

resource depletion – can have leverage: like a baby monkey at the controls of a Ferrari, they can turn it into an instrument with extraordinarily destructive potential. If it were a tissue of errors, it would not be dangerous: it is its 90 percent brilliance which makes it so.

Economics has therefore been seductive. The market economy is effective for sustaining social order: the distribution of goods, services and other assets is facilitated by buying and selling, supporting a network of exchange to which everyone has access. It provides suppliers with the incentive to know their markets and respond to them; it uses \*pull rather than top-down regulation, and it learns from experience, so it is effective and efficient. It supports a more egalitarian society than any other large-scale state has been capable of and it saves a great deal of trouble: it has appealed to minds glad of a cognitive technology which enabled them to make decisions according to mathematical models, and with little fear of contradiction.

“*Douce commerce*”, sweet commerce, wrote Jacques Savary, an early management consultant, in a textbook for businessmen (1685), “makes for all the gentleness of life.” The authorities themselves agreed: commerce is the most “innocent and legitimate way of acquiring wealth”, observed an edict of the French government in 1669; it is “the fertile source which brings abundance to the state and spreads it among its subjects”.


Indeed, the government’s main task in a mature market economy is to keep it free of obstacles that might stop it growing – like a bemused farmer would treat the enchanted goose: keep the foxes out so that it can go on magically laying its golden eggs.

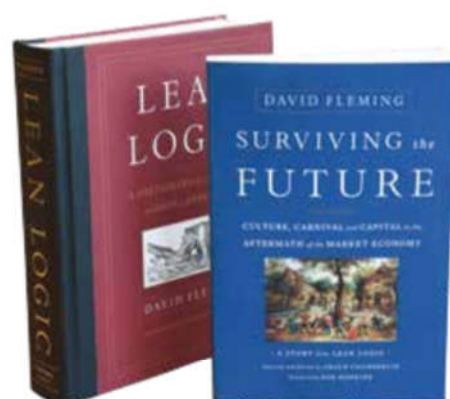
Its achievements and answers sound authoritative and final, but what is truly most significant about them is how naïve they are – if the flow of income fails, the powerfully-bonding combination of \*money and self-interest will no longer be available on its present all-embracing \*scale, and perhaps not at all. And it must inevitably fail, as the market’s taut \*competitiveness demands ever increasing \*productivity and thus relies on the impossibility of perpetual \*growth.

In the meantime, the reduction of a society and culture to dependence on mathematical \*abstraction has infantilised a grown-up civilisation and is well on the way to destroying it. Civilisations self-

destruct anyway, but it is reasonable to ask whether they have done so before with such enthusiasm, in obedience to such an acutely absurd superstition, while claiming with such insistence that they were beyond being seduced by the irrational promises of \*religion. Every civilisation has had its irrational but reassuring myth. Previous civilisations have used their culture to sing about it and tell stories about it. Ours has used its mathematics to prove it.

Yet, when this relatively short-lived market-society is gone, we will miss its essential simplicity, its price mechanism, its self-stabilising properties, its impersonal exchange, the comforts it delivers to many, and the \*freedoms it underwrites. Its failure will be destructive.

And the end is in sight; during the early decades of the century, the market will lose its magic. It is the aim of *Lean Logic* to suggest some principles for the design of a replacement. 



Recognising that *Lean Logic*’s sheer size and unusual structure could be daunting, Shaun Chamberlin has also selected and edited one of the potential pathways through the dictionary to create *Surviving the Future: Culture, Carnival and Capital in the Aftermath of the Market Economy*. The content, rare insights, and uniquely enjoyably writing style remain Fleming’s, but presented at a more accessible paperback-length and in conventional read-it-front-to-back format.

*Lean Logic* and *Surviving the Future* are both available from the CAT Ecostore at [store.cat.org.uk](http://store.cat.org.uk) or on 01654 705959. For more about either book see: <https://tinyurl.com/LeanLogic>.

Illustrations reproduced from *Lean Logic*.