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# "Sustainability and the 'Struggle for Existence': The Critical Role of Metaphor in Society's Metabolism"

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This paper presents a historical examination of the influence of the Darwinian metaphor "the struggle for existence" on a variety of scientific theories which inform our current understanding of the prospects for sustainable development. The first part of the paper traces the use of the metaphor of struggle through two distinct avenues of thought relevant to the search for sustainable development. One of these avenues leads to the biophysical critique of conventional development popularised by "ecological economists" such as Georgescu-Roegen and Daly. This critique suggests that modern economic systems have gone astray by failing to respect the biological and physical limits to development and that they should be adapted to make them more like ecological systems. The other avenue leads to the modern insights of evolutionary psychology. These latter insights suggest that in certain key respects, the economic system (and actors within it) are already behaving more or less like an ecological system, driven as they are by evolutionary imperatives. Consequently, this second avenue appears to offer far bleaker prospects for achieving sustainable development than the first. However, the final part of the paper re-examines the historical roots of the metaphor itself, and suggests a number of ways in which a critical response to those historical roots might influence our understanding of the prospects for sustainable development.
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