

BEYOND CAPITALISM: ESSAY ON RIFKIN'S THE AGE OF RESILIENCE

By Darby Riley

Jeremy Rifkin is a visionary economist and advisor to governments, including China, the European Union and the U.S. Senate. He is the best-selling author of 22 books translated into 35 languages.

In 2009, Rifkin was invited to San Antonio by Mayor Hardberger and CPS Energy to speak on a vision for our energy future. The ideas he laid out on the transition of the U.S. energy system to renewables have had a lasting impact on our city.

His 2022 book, *The Age of Resilience – Reimagining Existence on a Rewilding Earth* provides another leap forward in making sense of what is already a very

difficult 21st century for humanity and earthly life. There are presently over 20 million climate refugees every year, according to the United Nations.

The first half of the book shows how western nations began down the path of industrial civilization. It started with thinkers Rene Descartes, Isaac Newton, and others, who imagined a static universe where humans are separate autonomous conquerors of the earth. This flawed worldview later spread into Adam Smith's economic theories and into the business practices of Europeans and the West.

In the 19th and 20th centuries, science developed the laws of thermodynamics, which ultimately showed that humans are not separate but clearly part of nature, constantly changing and moving towards entropy, like all other beings.

However, business practices of the 20th century ignored the new science and continued down a path which considers each business transaction as an isolated event, ignoring the consequences which result from it; and considers the earth as a separate object to be plundered for short-term profits. The natural result of 250 years of such practices is the global environmental crisis we have stumbled into.

For hundreds of thousands of years, humans lived off the bounty of nature, creatively adapting to extreme environments. Only in the last 10,000 years, when the climate stabilized after the last Ice Age, have we attempted to disconnect ourselves from the air, water, soil and plant life that all life depends on.

Related historical factors which have led to our profound

damage to the biosphere include the doctrine of efficiency, which has been taught in U.S. and other business schools since the early 20th century.

This gospel holds that the goal of business is to maximize profits by treating workers not as humans but as objects. Amazon is a "prime" example of this common approach: it keeps its warehouse workers under surveillance to make sure they do not take more than 18 minutes for breaks during an 11-hour day. The resulting efficiency has yielded \$170 billion in profits for its owner, Jeff Bezos; and a lot of injuries and misery for its workers.

Rifkin shows how capitalism is in decline and is changing to a "digitally interconnected and dis-

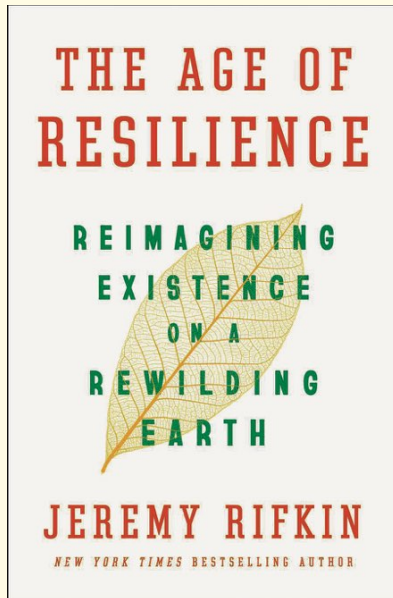
tributed sharing economy" which eventually will be outside the control of national governments and global corporations.

Capitalism runs on efficiency and consumerism powered by advertising, leading to environmental destruction. Besides the oil industry and industrial agriculture, another good example is the fashion industry, which is responsible for 10% of all global warming emissions and is the second largest water polluter. It runs on cheap labor with no environmental standards. The industry promotes constantly changing fashion leading to more purchases. This system results in massive waste, using annually 44 trillion liters of water a year for irrigation, and 2500 chemicals in manufacture.

Capitalism never wants to pay workers more than it has to, so the gap between the rich and everybody else has widened. The bursting of the housing debt bubble in 2008 would have caused capitalism to collapse but for government bailouts of the banks. Such bubbles repeatedly arise from unsustainable debt. Americans, whose wages have not risen since the 1970's, were \$14.3 trillion in credit card debt as of 2020, a historic high.

Rifkin explains that in the Third Industrial Revolution which is unfolding, humanity will necessarily move beyond capitalism. The workforce of the 21st century will increasingly center on stewarding the biosphere (the air, water and soil on which all life depends). There will be millions of new jobs to monitor and steward ecosystems, to address climate related disasters, and to create resilience and adaptivity in communities.

The new economy will have to deal with the unexpected, since we do not know how global warming and other envi-



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ronmental challenges will unfold. This will require humans to revert to the skills of our primitive past in which we creatively adapted to harsh and changing environments. “Resilience” here for organizations means strengthening by keeping options open, valuing heterogeneity and diversity, and viewing events in a regional rather than local context. It means realizing that we cannot precisely predict the future but must develop a capacity to devise systems that can absorb and accommodate future events in whatever unexpected form they may take. The 21st century will also see the development of complex adaptive social/ecological systems. Humans will respond to the environmental crises by “the initiation of a series of physiological, behavioral, ecological, and genetic changes that restore their ability to respond to subsequent unpredictable environmental changes.”

The computing power of ubiquitous cellphones, GPS technology, renewable energy distributed to millions of homes and businesses, electric vehicles, and other factors will help create a sharing economy, not based on profit but on mutual benefit. Early examples of the sharing economy are Uber, Wikipedia, Airbnb – over time the sponsoring middlemen will be cut out. The global oligopolies like Google, Apple and Facebook, which are built on selling users’ personal data, will be phased out as governments regulate antitrust and privacy issues. Europe has already begun doing so.

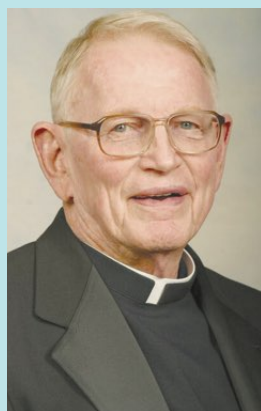
This new economic system, the first to develop since capitalism and socialism in the 18th and 19th centuries, will value QLI

(quality of life indicators) over GDP (gross domestic product, which measures all economic activity). It will require that humanity realize that it is kin to and dependent on all of life, and not separate or superior to other life forms. It will focus on restoring the air, soil, and water of the earth. Humans will reject consumerism and endless acquisition and redefine what makes a successful life.

Rifkin sees the beginnings of much greater participation by citizens in the management of their communities in what he calls “distributed peerocracy.” In order to steward our local bioregions through the climate emergencies, we need “a species-wide commitment to collectively participate in strong peerocratic governance.” This means every person must be involved. The idea is not Descartes’ “*I think, therefore I am,*” but rather “*I participate; therefore, I exist.*” To achieve this participation requires the expansion of “*biophilic consciousness*”: the feeling of deep empathic resonance with all of life – which is already rising in the younger generation.

The Age of Resilience is an exciting book, full of hope for the future, based on science and new thinking, on how we will preserve and strengthen life on earth in the face of the 21st century challenges.

BIO: Darby Riley practices law in San Antonio with his son, Charles Riley, and is a long-time environmental activist. He is a active with the Sierra Club.



Rev. William (Bill) Davis

March 27, 1931 – December 18, 2023

Rev. William “Bill” Davis, OM, born in San Antonio, Texas, died here at the age of 92 years. He professed vows as a member of the *Congregation of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate* on May 31, 1954 and was ordained to the priesthood on June 1, 1957 in San Antonio. He taught at the *Oblate Seminary* in Mexico City where he honed his skills in

Spanish. That was followed by ten years of teaching in San Antonio at St. Anthony’s Catholic High School. Father Davis was campus minister at Our Lady of the Lake University, San Antonio, between 1978-1981. His pastoral ministry in San Antonio began at *St. Alphonsus Church* in San Antonio, a poor church located in the barrio where he found his voice as a social activist and would take part in programs and marches to improve the lives of his parishioners. While there he was very active as a supporter of C.O.P.S. (*Communities Organized for Public Service*) and continued supporting grassroots organizing efforts by community members. In 1986, he facilitated the rental of *Esperanza Peace & Justice Center’s* first building at 922 N. Flores for \$1 per year, from the Oblate Fathers. From 1990-1993 he served in the Oblate mission in Zambia. Back in Texas his last two pastorates were at *Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish*, Houston, and *San Francisco Javier*, Laredo, a parish that was extremely poor, with mostly elderly and immigrant parishioners. His dedication and Spanish-language skills immediately

attracted a congregation that continued to grow. He expanded his focus to include environmental concerns and was active in an effort to get plastic bags banned in Laredo which had been littering the community and causing significant problems for the city’s creeks and storm drains. In 2014 Fr. Bill formed “*The Samaritans,*” a group of parishioners who lend a hand to anyone who needs it — the elderly, disabled, sick, lonely and grieving. The good works of *The Samaritans* began to draw attention beyond the parish and was a reason why Fr. Bill was nominated for a national award, the *Lumen Christi Award from Catholic Extension*. Since, 2016, Fr. Davis has lived at Oblate Madonna Residence in San Antonio. Fr. Davis will be remembered with respect and esteem by his Oblate brothers and all the people who were recipients of his pastoral care for 60 years. He was celebrated in services on December 28, 2023 and was buried at the Oblate Cemetery in San Antonio.

Memorial donations in honor of Father Davis may be sent to Oblate Madonna Residence, 5722 Blanco Road, San Antonio, TX 78216. The Esperanza board, staff and Buena gente will hold Fr. Bill in esteem and extend condolences to his family, friends and parishioners on his passing. ¡Que en paz y poder descanse!

