Jeffrey D. Sachs is Director of the Earth Institute at Columbia University Special Advisor to UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon. Jeff is teaching a course called The Age of Sustainable Development, below is a guest blogpost written by Jeff on the course.

“For man holds in his mortal hands the power to abolish all form of human poverty and all forms of human life,” John F. Kennedy observed a half-century ago, and his observation speaks to us today with special urgency.

Our generation is truly the first that can end the ancient scourge of extreme poverty. Yet is also the one that can destroy the Earth’s life support system through human-induced environmental destruction. We have entered the Age of Sustainable Development. I am therefore enormously excited and pleased to be launching a free, global, online university course in this critical subject in January 2014.

Sustainable Development is both a way of looking at the world, and a way of helping to save it. As a method of understanding the world, Sustainable Development practitioners study the interactions of the economy, environment, politics, and culture as they relate to economic prosperity, social inclusion, and environmental sustainability. As a method of helping to save the world, Sustainable Development encourages society to take a holistic approach to human well-being that ties together economic progress, strong social bonds, and environmental sustainability.

I predict that Sustainable Development will become the organizing principle for our politics, economics, and even ethics in the years ahead. That’s why the world’s governments have agreed to place Sustainable Development at the very center of the world’s development agenda in the years after 2015. They will soon adopt Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to help guide the world to a safer and fairer 21st century trajectory around the global challenges we are facing, including energy, food, water, climate and jobs.

For most of my first 30 years as a professor, the basic educational technologies didn’t change much. I stood in front of a class and gave a 57 minute lecture. Yes, the blackboard gave way to an overhead projector, and then to PowerPoint, but otherwise the basic classroom “production technology” changed little.

Yet in recent years, technology is fundamentally transforming education, and very much for the better. In the 21st century, education is more critical than ever rather than watch me lecture for an hour, my students at Columbia University will watch the online lectures ahead of time so that we can engage in a much richer in-class discussion.

In the years ahead, we will all have to become leaders in sustainable development in our homes, communities, and nations. Millions of young people will be the problem solvers of the future. Thousands of cities and 200 countries around the world will need to convene all stakeholders – government, communities, experts, business, and non-governmental organizations – to play their roles, and open online education will be key to disseminating necessary information.

This is why my class is part of a broader online education effort of the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN), an initiative under the auspices of UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon that I am honored to direct. The SDSN mobilizes scientific and technical expertise from academia, civil society, and the private sector in support of sustainable development problem solving at local, national, and global scales. One of its five key objectives is to develop and disseminate online education materials for sustainable development for students all over the world; and so we will be working with global academic partners to incorporate The Age of Sustainable Development into their own classes, tailored for local circumstances and issues.

Over a dozen institutions are already on board, and I encourage anyone interested to participate. The combination of global and local education and problem-solving is critical to the sustainable development challenge.

Please enroll, listen in, enjoy, enquire, and engage. - Jeff
If Dr. Jeff is at all sincere and worth listening to, he’ll talk about Socioeconomic Democracy. In case the Gentle Reader hasn’t yet heard, SeD is about the following:

We wish to suggest the serious consideration of Socioeconomic Democracy as a peaceful, just and democratic resolution of the myriad unnecessary and painful problems confronting humanity caused by the maldistribution of wealth both within and among nations, and most definitely the very real problem of Sustainable Development.

Socioeconomic Democracy is a theoretically consistent and practically implementable socioeconomic system wherein there exist both some form and amount of locally appropriate Universally Guaranteed Personal Income and some form and amount of locally appropriate Maximum Allowable Personal Wealth, with both the lower bound on personal material poverty and the upper bound on personal material wealth set and adjusted democratically by all participants of a democratic society.

Socioeconomic Democracy is trivially accomplished with elementary Public Choice Theory. It further provides the necessary and presently missing...