# Like a chicken talking to a duck about a kettle of fish

Richard M. Hutchings[1,*] & Marina La Salle[2]

> *I am happily too busy doing science to have time to worry about philosophizing about it* (Arno Penzias, in Flannery 1982: 265).

In our debate piece, we pose a basic philosophical question about sustainable archaeology (Hutchings & La Salle 2019). Our point is that the addition of the adjective 'sustainable' to archaeology does not change what archaeology is. Rather, it has the net effect of covering up and legitimising the harm inflicted by archaeology. We suggest that sustainable archaeology serves to ease disciplinary and institutional anxieties around an unethical past and an increasingly uncertain future. Archaeology's threats are existential insofar as people today are not only questioning whether archaeology should exist in the future (Wurst 2019), but also are actively "taking archaeology out of heritage" (Smith & Waterton 2009a: 3).

We learn from the responses to our debate piece that archaeologists still struggle to discuss critically and self-reflexively archaeology's dark side (Clarke 1973; Hutchings 2019). To understand better the socio-politics of some of these tensions, we note this key passage from Carman's (2016: 145) article 'Educating for sustainability in archaeology':

> *As Smith and Waterton (2009b: 143) put it, archaeologists "are a community group themselves and act in much the same way as other communities to protect their interests and aspirations". It is clear, for instance, that in practice the most avowedly 'democratic' archaeology projects are in fact the product not of local community desire, but rather that of the archaeologists involved.*

Sustainable archaeology represents such a democratic project and the archaeologists involved, feeling threatened, have set out to protect their interests. What exactly those interests are, however, is not always clear.

Guttmann-Bond (2019a: 1667) labels our inquiry "anti-intellectual". Given that archaeology is her "love" (2019b: viii), it is understandable that she rejects our argument. Instead, she is selling the idea that "archaeology can save the planet" (2010, 2019b), a notion that critics have decried as 'fanciful', 'romantic', 'pie in the sky', 'impractical' and 'doomed to

1 *Institute for Critical Heritage and Tourism (ICHT), 330 Spruce Avenue, Gabriola Island, British Columbia V0R 1X1, Canada*

2 *Department of Anthropology, Vancouver Island University (VIU), 900 Fifth Street, Nanaimo, British Columbia V9R 5S5, Canada*

* *Author for correspondence (Email: rmhutchings@icht.ca)*

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ANTIQUITY 93 372 (2019): 1672–1675 https://doi.org/10.15184/aqy.2019.210



https://doi.org/10.15184/aqy.2019.210 Published online by Cambridge University Press

failure'. One practical reason that Guttmann-Bond's plan seems doomed is because she is trying to resolve large-, industrial- or modern-scale problems (Giddens 1990) with strategies designed for medium- and small-scale societies (Smith & Wishnie 2000; Lertzman 2009), strategies that she notes herself were made obsolete by the pressures of industrialisation. Additionally, most of her case studies are derived from ethnographic and ecological research, not archaeology. In fact, Guttmann-Bond has chosen to focus in her response on "ways in which people in the past lived sustainably", and thus does not address our central thesis: that the *new* definition of sustainable archaeology is greenwashing.

Nonetheless, it is significant that Guttmann-Bond's reaction to our thesis is to argue for the relevance of archaeology to the current climate crisis. This is because her views (2010, 2019a & b) constitute what sociologist Anthony Giddens calls 'sustained optimism'. This is defined as:

> *the persistence of the attitudes of the Enlightenment, a continued faith* […] *in spite of whatever dangers threaten at the current time. This is the outlook of those experts* […] *who have criticised 'doomsday' ecological scenarios in favour of the view that social and technological solutions can be found for the major global problems* […] *it is a perspective which continues to hold great resonance and emotional appeal, based as it is upon a conviction that unfettered rational thought and particularly science offer sources of long-term security that no other orientations can match* (Giddens 1990: 136).

Guttmann-Bond (2019a: 1666) critiques our work because we "argue that archaeology is self-interested and exploitative" and because we "do not discuss the things that archaeology can teach us about conservation and sustainable living". Yet it has long been recognised that archaeology is self-interested and exploitative (Clarke 1973; Shanks & Tilley 1987; Smith 2004; Smith & Waterton 2009a & b). Guttmann-Bond's approach belies an aversion to politics and an unbridled faith in science. Her solution is more archaeology, not more philosophy, a position that we feel is inherently limited.

Pikirayi (2019: 1669) also steers the conversation away from archaeology's harms and towards "conventional, research-driven archaeology" aimed at "understanding how past societies lived sustainably". Thus, like Guttmann-Bond, Pikirayi does not engage with our central thesis concerning the new use of the term 'sustainable archaeology'.

While Högberg and Holtorf (2019: 1661) agree with our central thesis, they stay true to their title, 'The valuable contributions of archaeology', steering the conversation away from the fundamental problems with the discipline by advocating for its "gradual transformation and improvement". Given the current speed of global ecological breakdown and long history of inaction by archaeologists, we do not understand what they mean by 'gradual'. We are also surprised by their lack of attention to (the politics of) colonialism, and dispute their argument against Indigenous and local control over heritage (cf. United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (United Nations 2007)). While Högberg and Holtorf (2019: 1661) suggest that the future of "archaeology as we know it" should not be presumed, they ultimately advocate sustaining it. Prioritising archaeology, they conclude that criticism such as ours risks "undermining opportunities" for archaeologists (Högberg & Holtorf 2019: 1662).

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Perhaps because Gnecco (2019) studies archaeological resource management in a global, capitalist context, he is the only respondent who engages fully with our core argument. Gnecco's views on the global nature of capitalist exploitation are significant, as both Guttmann-Bond and Högberg and Holtorf challenge the geographic relevance of our argument. The former suggests that ours are only "ethical issues within North American archaeology" (Guttmann-Bond 2019a: 1666); the latter claim that our arguments are not persuasive "based on [their] experiences in Europe" (Högberg & Holtorf 2019: 1662). These can be seen as attempts by European scholars to externalise the damage caused by resource extraction and archaeology. Yet, the global trade and consumption of these resources and the well-documented effects of their extraction on ecosystems and communities around the world are irrefutable.

## Conclusion

The four responses to our debate piece expose a contradiction in contemporary archaeological discourse. On one hand, there appears to be little, if any, agreement about what archaeology is; compare, for example, Högberg and Holtorf (2019) and Pikirayi (2019). On the other hand, there is the appearance of near-total agreement, as exemplified by Pikirayi (2019) and Guttmann-Bond (2019a). This contradiction suggests that archaeology has grown so much that it is now too philosophically fragmented to be defined as a coherent entity (Zubrow 1989) and/or that archaeologists take key aspects of archaeology's definition for granted (Hutchings 2019, in press). Either way, the contradiction is significant. It suggests that philosophical debates such as this one may be a waste of time. How can archaeologists engage in a meaningful philosophical dialogue if they do not agree upon, or take for granted, key aspects of archaeology's definition, such as modernity, positivism, capitalism and cultural resource management? Hence, our exploration of sustainable archaeology has been informative in the sense that it has led us to a much wider question: what is archaeology?

### Acknowledgements

We thank *Antiquity* for hosting this debate as well as all of the respondents for their input.

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