

Freedom Matters

A Weekly Newsletter

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We are a free people in a republic, under a constitution which limits the powers of government to those necessary to secure the unalienable rights of each person to their life, liberty and property. Yet, when a legislature is in session, no one's life, liberty or property is safe. It's the curse of a democracy. That's why we have a republic instead. *Freedom Matters* dedicates itself to the fight to restore our republic. Most of the press and courts fail to do so. They've forgotten that freedom matters.

Sustainable Development Is Unsustainable. Part 6. A Grab-Bag of Warm and Fuzzy Wishes

by Bob Bowman

This series, now at Part 6, is reviewing Beckerman's book, *A Poverty of Reason*. Parts 4 and 5 had to bring in other data to look at the most burning issue, i.e., the issue raised by **Malthus** in 1798 (i.e., will our increase in population exhaust the resources necessary to support our civilization), an issue newly visited (hence, neo-Malthusian) in the book *The Limits to Growth*, in 1972. The answer, as Part 5 (issue #19) noted, is that it will not.

That Malthusian issue is at the core of the Brundtland definition of sustainable development: i.e., "*development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.*"

Non-Malthusian Parts of the Definition of "Sustainable Development"

Yet, the Brundtland Commission went way beyond the Malthusian issue. In a political free-for-all, it tacked on a wish-list of causes other than whether civilization will crash by running out of resources. These added issues include conservation of species, social equity, pollution, global warming, bio-diversity spheres (i.e., the wilderness religion, or Gaia), and the precautionary principle. Some of these added issues are controversial, or of dubious merit, or may even be poison pills. Let us see.

Conservation of Species

Beckerman quotes this add-on to the Malthusian core of the Brundtland definition thus: "*The loss of plant and animal species can greatly limit the options of future generations, so sustainable development requires the conservation of plant and animal species.*" He charges that this makes sustainable development "not so much meaningless as morally outrageous."

Beckerman is too kind. His criticism should say that it makes the concept "**both** morally outrageous and meaningless." As he notes, nature destroys species as readily as it creates them; i.e., he says that probably 98% of all species that have existed have gone extinct. Almost certainly, far more species went extinct **before** the advent of humans than since.

We can add the following point to those that Beckerman himself made. Some writers have argued that we humans owe our very existence to the fact that dinosaurs went extinct. In a word, the extinction of species is an ever-ongoing and inevitable process, and if we value our own species at all, we see that such extinctions can be to the good as well as to the bad.

That makes it a fanaticism of environmentalists, and also of the U.N.'s Brundtland Commission -- a hubris bred of arrogance

if not of ignorance -- that they require the conservation of species down to every bug, strain or variant that currently exists, without distinction as to merit. It is that which Beckerman terms morally outrageous or morally repugnant. Species such as mundane beetles, he says, are not worth the huge costs required to try to perpetuate their species, when there are more important needs to which humans ought to put such resources.

This moral outrage is not overcome by packaging the issue as one of "bio-diversity;" i.e., environmentalists argue, without proof by data, that the more species there are, the "better." Even if that were so, it is likely that after some moderate level of bio-diversity, more of it produces no significant added benefit.

In any event, it is impossible to perpetuate every species, even if we humans were to retreat from 99% of the land mass of the earth, as a way to try to "save" all species. So, we humans should not retreat at all, without compelling reason. We are part of the environment, and our needs have just as much right to shape the environment, even to the elimination of species, as the needs of any other species has. Given that any extinctions we cause may be to the good rather than to the bad, such extinctions are thereby apt to help the cause of evolution rather than to harm it. There is no rule or calculus that proves harm. For that reason, the conservation of species -- beyond some moderate bio-diversity -- is of uncertain or even dubious merit.

Needed Action. Re the U.S.A., our congress and President have a moral and fiscal obligation to immediately repeal the endangered species and critical habitat laws, and to rewrite them into sensible law. It is necessary to repeal those laws, to get the job done, for in that way, the environmentalist lobby, instead of acting as obstructionists, will be forced to help formulate and enact a responsible and balanced environmental policy.

The next issue of *Freedom Matters*, will address the thorny concept of "**Social Equity**" in sustainable development.

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