



INDIVISIBLE

Social and Economic Foundations of American Liberty

Leading Conservatives
Exchange Policy Perspectives

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INTRODUCTION BY JAY W. RICHARDS

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ENVIRONMENT

Conserving Creation

BY TONY PERKINS



Tony Perkins

IN 1907, PRESIDENT THEODORE ROOSEVELT CALLED together a “Forest Congress” in Washington, D.C., composed of both lumbermen and conservationists. In his opening address, he used two terms to describe his view of how to treat our natural resources: *use* and *preservation*. He saw these two ideas—prudent use and wise preservation—not as opponents but as partners in the venture to keep America both green and productive.

Conservatives should approach environmental issues in the same spirit: Sustaining our natural resources for both their beauty and their utility is good public policy.

Yet today, many in academia, government, and the media seem to regard man as a cancer on the planet to be stopped, rather than as the ultimate “renewable resource.” And they seem to view the environment as an entity with almost divine characteristics that merits not just good stewardship but virtual worship.

THE VAGARIES OF CLIMATE

Let’s begin with some perspective. In the 1880s, terrible blizzards paralyzed the United States; New York City took weeks to dig out. At that time, of course, the concern was about the earth’s *cooling*. By the 1920s, *warming* was on the agenda. America suffered major flooding in 1927, and farmers in Oklahoma

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and Arkansas were driven from their homes by the terrible dust storms of the ’20s and ’30s. This turned vast tracts of the American heartland into a Dust Bowl.

The pendulum swung again about 35 years ago. *Newsweek* magazine warned readers of “a new Ice Age.” Once again, it was *cooling* that worried some scientists as well as their eager supporters in the media and, consequently, many Americans.

At the moment, of course, the concern is, again, warming. But swings in climate are nothing new. They happen over the course of a single century and throughout many millennia. As noted by geologist Dr. R. Timothy Patterson of Canada’s Carleton University:

Climate stability has never been a feature of planet Earth. The only constant about climate is change; it changes continually and, at times, quite rapidly. Many times in the past, temperatures were far higher than today, and occasionally, temperatures were colder. As recently as 6,000 years ago, it was about 3C warmer than now. Ten thousand years ago, while the world was coming out of the thousand-year-long “Younger Dryas” cold episode, temperatures rose as much as 6C in a decade—100 times faster

than the past century's 0.6C warming that has so upset environmentalists.⁴⁵

So the climate change we are currently experiencing is neither new nor unprecedented. With every minor shift in the weather, however, there seems to have been a corresponding shift in scientific and media preoccupation with either warming or cooling. Calmer, if not cooler, heads need to prevail.

THE ROOTS OF MODERN ENVIRONMENTALISM

No one disputes the fact that the West went through a period of rapid industrialization that polluted air and water and caused serious environmental damage in some places. Even today, throughout the developing world, regard for the environment often is far from the top priority, since basic survival is still at stake. In North America, however, where the "Green Movement" is at near fever-pitch, enormous strides have been made—and quickly forgotten—in recent decades.

Still, the most extreme environmentalists want to return the human population to a more primitive state, even if they hurt the environment in doing so. The self-named Earth Liberation Front took credit for torching a Vail, Colorado, ski resort in 1998, releasing massive smoke into the atmosphere. They have burned SUVs, homes, and university facilities, sending airborne pollutants far and wide—all in the name of the environment.

The Sierra Club, Friends of the Earth, the Natural Resources Defense Council, and a host of other environmental groups are less radical in their conduct yet often call for dramatic, counterproductive solutions to real or perceived problems. Walling off forests, mineral-rich lands, and coal fields from development or so restricting construction that costs rise prohibitively high, our national policies too often reflect the agenda of the environmental Left rather than commonsense approaches that allow market-based incentives to work efficiently.

Much of this was inspired by a distorted interpretation of the Judeo-Christian view of the environment. This misinterpretation was immortalized by Lynn White's highly influential 1967 *Science* magazine article, "The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis." White pegged the source of our troubles in the Judeo-Christian ethic, writing: "Both our present science and our present technology are so tinctured with Christian arrogance toward nature that no solution for our ecologic crisis can be expected from them alone." He even asserted that since "the roots of our trouble are so largely religious, the remedy must also be essentially religious, whether we call it that or not....[We] shall have a worsening ecologic crisis until we reject the Christian axiom that nature has no reason for existence save to serve

45 R. Timothy Patterson, "Read the Sunspots," *Financial Post* (Canada), June 20, 2007, at <http://www.canada.com/nationalpost/financialpost/comment/story.html?id=597d0677-2a05-47b4-b34f-b84068db11f4&p=4> (accessed August 12, 2009).

man.”⁴⁶ [Emphasis added.]

Sadly, White’s misrepresentation of biblical teaching was received unblinkingly by many of his disciples. Contrary to White’s claims, however, the Scriptural instruction is that “the earth is the Lord’s, and all the fullness thereof.” This demands respect and wisdom as to its use. The Bible nowhere justifies raw exploitation. The “dominion” of wise stewards is not the domination of a tyrant.

White’s call for a religious offensive against the Judeo-Christian understanding of nature has largely been fulfilled. In the words of columnist Charles

Rather than seeing us as responsible stewards, radical environmentalism sees man as the enemy of the environment, not the solution to environmental problems.

Krauthammer, “Environmentalists are Gaia’s priests, instructing us in her proper service and casting out those who refuse to genuflect. And having proclaimed the ultimate commandment—carbon chastity—they are preparing the support-

ing canonical legislation that will tell you how much you can travel, what kind of light you will read by, and at what temperature you may set your bedroom thermostat.”⁴⁷

Rather than seeing us as responsible stewards, radical environmentalism sees man as the enemy of the environment, not the solution to environmental problems.

MAN AS THE PROBLEM

In *The Ethics of Environmental Concern*, Robin Attfield writes:

The scientific view [teaches us that] man differs from the other animals not in kind but in degree. He is an animal among his fellow animals, and has no dominion over them except insofar as his intelligence makes him their effective superior. As an animal he is mortal, and made of matter like everything else, for there is no soul and no Creator, nor anything else which cannot be investigated empirically. Indeed there may be nothing more distinctive about man than the absence of body hair.⁴⁸

Attfield has confused philosophical materialism with science. And that common confusion has consequences. This perspective—man as mere matter—leads to a larger belief among some environmentalists that human population has grown too fast, and that human progeny are a curse, not a blessing. If we are merely intellectually higher mammals, they reason, then we need to be culled and

46 Lynn White, Jr., “The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis,” *Science*, March 10, 1967.

47 Charles Krauthammer, “Moving Toward Energy Rationing,” RealClearPolitics.com, May 30, 2008, at http://www.realclearpolitics.com/articles/2008/05/moving_toward_rationing.html (accessed June 30, 2009).

48 Robin Attfield, *The Ethics of Environmental Concern* (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 2004), p. 52.

limited like any other overgrown flock.

The radical environmental “ethicist” Peter Singer follows this logical train to the very end of the line. Singer has argued that “the traditional view of the sanctity of human life will collapse under pressure from scientific, technological and demographic developments.”⁴⁹

Dehumanization leads many on the environmental Left to support efforts to drastically prune the growth of the human population. Ironically, it is depopulation, not “overpopulation,” that is the gravest threat to our future. Using the United Nations’ own data, demographer Nick Eberstadt warns of an “Old Age Tsunami”—not only in the developed West but also in countries such as China, India, Korea, Russia, and even the Arab world. Such evidence should lead us to question why U.S. tax dollars go to fund such anti-birth outfits as the U.N. Population Fund (UNFPA), Planned Parenthood, and a host of U.N. conferences on various issues.

Fears of overpopulation have led to profound moral mischief. Justice Harry Blackmun expressed concern about overpopulation in his 1973 opinion in *Roe v. Wade*. Forty-five million U.S. children have been aborted since then. Elsewhere, claims of overpopulation have led to other gross abuses of human rights. In China alone, since the early 1980s, the “one child” policy has resulted in millions of forced abortions and widespread female infanticide. According to a recent report in the *BMJ*, a publication of the British Medical Association, China’s policies have resulted not in population reduction as such but rather in a marriage-age population composed of 32 million more men than women.⁵⁰

UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES

The late Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan once complained that our society has defined deviancy down. We have also defined down our understanding of environmental stewardship.

This is not recent. Paul Ehrlich’s 1970 book, *The Population Bomb*, claimed that the world would be hit by famine, revolutions, and wars—all because of overpopulation. For environmental reasons, Ehrlich argued, we needed population control on a global scale.

In 1980, the late Julian Simon, a noted University of Maryland economist, bet Ehrlich \$1,000 that over the next decade the real prices of any five commodities would go *down*. Simon easily won that challenge. All five commodities were

49 Peter Singer, “The Sanctity of Life,” *Foreign Policy* (September/October 2005).

50 Wei Xing Zhu, Li Lu, and Therese Hesketh, “China’s Excess Males, Sex Selective Abortion, and One Child Policy: Analysis of Data from 2005 National Intercensus Survey,” *BMJ*, April 9, 2009 at http://www.bmj.com/cgi/content/full/338/apr09_2/b1211?maxtoshow=&HITS=10&hits=10&RESULTFORMAT=&fulltext=chinese+population&searchid=1&FIRSTINDEX=0&fdate=4/1/2009&tdate=5/31/2009&resource_type=HWCIT (accessed July 20, 2009).

more plentiful and less expensive (adjusted for inflation) by the decade's end.⁵¹ But the fact that events have proved Ehrlich's doomsday predictions false has not made him a dishonored prophet.

What has been discredited, and should be dishonored, are radical environmentalism's policies that have done great damage to people in the developing world. For example, after the ban on DDT, inspired by Rachel Carson's best-selling book, *Silent Spring*, malaria has claimed millions of lives throughout the lesser-developed countries. Although some DDT spraying has occurred in the developing world in recent years, Robert Gwadz of the National Institutes of Health estimates that as many as 20 million people may have died of malaria because of the global ban on DDT. Whatever the exact number, the toll has been enormous.

Or consider ethanol, a corn-derivative fuel that some environmentalists hail as a cure for automobile carbon emissions. As more corn goes to fuel, less goes to the poor in developing countries where for generations corn has been a staple. Ironically, ethanol production is far from clean. *Time* magazine devoted a major story to what it called "the clean energy scam," noting:

The biofuel boom is doing exactly the opposite of what its proponents intended: it's dramatically accelerating global warming, imperiling the planet in the name of saving it. Corn ethanol, always environmentally suspect, turns out to be environmentally disastrous. Even cellulosic ethanol made from switchgrass, which has been promoted by eco-activists and eco-investors...looks less green than oil-derived gasoline. Meanwhile, by diverting grain and oilseed crops from dinner plates to fuel tanks, biofuels are jacking up world food prices and endangering the hungry.⁵²

As David Stirling of The Heartland Institute asked, "What kind of ethos could motivate federal officials to elevate the concerns of mice and rats over those of human beings in their darkest hour of need?"⁵³ The answer: The wrong understanding of the nature of man.

WHERE WE GO FROM HERE

For decades, Americans' Judeo-Christian roots have encouraged us to conserve what has been viewed as God's creation. While we have not always lived up to our ideals, we should not minimize the gains we have made. Since the early 1970s, our rivers, lakes, and skies are demonstrably cleaner. Not so long ago, Ohio's Cuyahoga River actually caught fire because of pollution! It has now made

51 Julian Simon, *The Ultimate Resource 2* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1996), pp. 32–33.

52 Michael Grunwald, "The Clean Energy Scam," *Time*, March 27, 2008.

53 Quoted in Jay Lehr, Ph.D., "Activists' Excesses Called to Account," The Heartland Institute, at http://www.heartland.org/publications/environment%20climate/article/24379/Activists_Excesses_Called_to_Account.html (accessed August 21, 2009).

a recovery that many claimed was impossible. And a few decades ago, wealthy Pittsburghers often went home at noon from their downtown offices—to change their sooty, formerly white shirts.

Our successes in environmental protection have been formidable. For example, according to former Delaware Governor Pete DuPont:

Since 1970, the year of the first Earth Day, America's population has increased by 42%, the country's inflation-adjusted gross domestic product has grown 195%, the number of cars and trucks in the United States has more than doubled, and the total number of miles driven has increased by 178%. But during these 35 years of growing population, employment, and industrial production, the Environmental Protection Agency reports, the environment has substantially improved. Emissions of the six principal air pollutants have decreased by 53%. Carbon monoxide emissions have dropped from 197 million tons per year to 89 million; nitrogen oxides from 27 million tons to 19 million, and sulfur dioxide from 31 million to 15 million. Particulates are down 80%, and lead emissions have declined by more than 98%.⁵⁴

These achievements are seldom heralded. Instead, the environmental Left browbeats even young children into accepting a set of glum ideas that bode dangerously for our future: Humans are exploiters. Population growth is evil. And the earth has the characteristics of a deity and thus merits not just good stewardship but worship.

These claims reject the Judeo-Christian teaching that man, the image-bearer of the God of all creation, has a duty to optimize the productivity of the earth in a responsible but efficient manner. Stewardship—caring for and using wisely what has been entrusted to us—is the true biblical model. It also comports with one of the most endangered intellectual species of our time, common sense.

From a purely environmental perspective, the socialist countries of the world not only sacrificed millions of human lives and human liberty, they also raped the planet. The former USSR gave the world the nuclear catastrophe at Chernobyl. Similarly, Communist China had to shut down all factories in its capital region *for two weeks* prior to the 2008 Beijing Olympics. This was so the athletes could breathe and the spectators could see the stadium scoreboards! Americans should take no lessons from socialist regimes regarding the environment.

We must reaffirm an environmental policy that acknowledges our Creator, honors human centrality and importance, and respects the created order. This is morally right and, in practical terms, simply makes sense. Creating sound environmental policy through a balance of well-documented scientific data and a recognition of the obvious need for minerals and ores, roads and construction, and food and water

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54 Pete DuPont, "Don't Be Very Worried," *The Wall Street Journal*, May 23, 2006.

supplies will work to the benefit of all.

This chapter began by mentioning Theodore Roosevelt's Forest Congress. I'll close with a telling story about a presidential train trip he took to the West Coast. Along the way, his train stopped at many a small town. Farmers and their wives brought their children to see the famous "Rough Rider." T.R. would speak from the rear of the train, commending these farm communities on their bumper crops of wheat, corn, rye, and sorghum. But the best bumper crop, the President said, was the large number of healthy, happy American *babies* he saw.

Roosevelt understood that human beings are the greatest, most noble and most beautiful of all God's creations and resources. He understood that people are not the adversaries of a clean, healthy environment and that, on the contrary, they are not only essential to the wise care of that environment but are the centerpiece of it.

Without this perspective, the radical wing of the environmental movement will continue mounting anti-human environmental campaigns. With it, we can launch a new era in which sound science and respect for creation are balanced with the realities of human needs and economic growth. That balance can be achieved. Let's pursue it with boldness, wisdom, and courage.

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