

II.C. GREEN SUSTAINABILITY

Summary

In II.C.1 we assess the narrative scenario of Green sustainability. This scenario presents a vision of the human future that integrates values of ecological integrity, social justice and cooperation. Two special burdens of Green sustainability are that it is justified to an important extent by appeals to necessity rather than inherent desirability; and that the near universal adoption of its main tenets is required if it is to be realized at all. If its necessity is difficult to establish, its inherent desirability needs to be nearly universally affirmed.

Section II.C.2 reviews the results of public opinion polls concerning environmental protection, economic growth and consumption. Support for environmental protection among Americans is very broad but may not be especially deep. Americans express a high willingness-to-pay for environmental protection in the abstract, but when specific dollar commitments are solicited this support weakens. Americans show strong support for modifying particular consumption practices to avoid harming the environment, but reject suggestions that their aggregate levels of consumption should be reduced. Analogous patterns appear in surveys conducted in countries other than the United States.

Section II.C.3 presents the results of a survey of participants at a major conference on voluntary simplicity, held in 1998. For the respondents, voluntary simplicity means reducing consumption, leading a peaceful inner life, and living in harmony with the planet. The respondents were middle-aged, middle class, and highly educated. Just over half (52%) said that the “desirable and achievable” rate of economic growth for the United States for the next 50 years was zero or negative; the other 48% believed that a positive growth rate was desirable and achievable. Most respondents favored higher incomes for families in the lowest income quintile, and anticipated higher incomes for themselves. Respondents’ household incomes were higher

than the average for all households but somewhat lower than the average for persons with similar levels of formal education.

Section II.C.4 evaluates the findings of the three preceding sections. We conclude that the scenario of Green sustainability, as presently developed, is not likely to be sufficiently inherently desirable to enough people to serve as the core advocated narrative scenario of a global future. However, many tenets of Green sustainability may be realizable as elements within other scenarios. Although a “no growth” scenario is difficult to argue for as an empirical imperative, and is not considered inherently desirable, a “slow growth” preferential option may be more credible on both counts. We reconsider our choice of quantitative Scenario 5 as a possible advocated scenario, and suggest that Scenario 3 be considered instead. We also suggest that the narrative scenario of social democratic internationalism be considered in lieu of Green sustainability.

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II.C.1. IS GREEN SUSTAINABILITY A NECESSITY OR A CHOICE?

In Box IB-15 the scenario of Green sustainability is characterized as being grounded in doubts that global economic, political and technological systems committed to continual economic growth are sustainable. Advocates of Green sustainability call for low consumption, cooperative human relations and greater respect for nature, among other things. The scenario of Green sustainability is important because it stands as a clear alternative to the trajectories that would be followed both by techno-global neoliberalism, and by most versions of social-democratic internationalism.

Green sustainability as an advocated scenario for the future sprang from the social and intellectual ferment of the late 1960's and was fully formed by 1973, a period of barely five or six years. Remarkably, the core elements of the Green sustainability scenario have not changed in any important ways in the more than three decades since that time. **IIC-1** shows important texts that have informed and marked the development and popularization of Green sustainability.

In these notes I consider the tenets of Green sustainability to include but go beyond those of environmentalism. I use “environmentalism” to suggest a commitment to protecting the earth's natural systems. This commitment can be stronger or weaker, and can be held by persons otherwise holding to a wide variety of political and social points of view. By contrast, Green sustainability puts environmental concerns at the very center of its commitment, and joins to this a number of other fundamental commitments. **IIC-2** shows “Ten Key Values” espoused by Americans active in the Green Party.¹ An expanded statement of what “being Green” means is shown in **IIC-3**.

¹ These “Ten Key Values” were developed in the mid-1980's by the German Greens and have been adopted, with minor differences (e.g., “post-patriarchal values” instead of “feminism”) by many of the several hundred Green Party organizations around the world.

BOX IIC-1. Fifty Years of Green Sustainability: A history in texts

| | | |
|--|------|--|
| Wolfgang Sachs et al. | 1998 | <i>Greening the North</i> |
| Paul Shepard | 1998 | <i>Coming Home to the Pleistocene</i> |
| Hartmut Bossel | 1998 | <i>Earth at a Crossroads: Paths to a Sustainable Future</i> |
| Amory Lovins, et al. | 1997 | <i>Factor Four</i> |
| Stephanie Mills | 1997 | <i>Turning Away from Technology</i> |
| Brian Tokar | 1997 | <i>Earth for Sale</i> |
| Tom Athanasiou | 1996 | <i>Divided Planet: The Ecology of Rich and Poor</i> |
| Herman Daly | 1996 | <i>Beyond Growth</i> |
| Richard Peets, Michael Watts | 1996 | <i>Liberation Ecology</i> |
| President's Council for Sustainable Development | 1996 | <i>Sustainable America: A new consensus for prosperity, opportunity, and a healthy environment</i> |
| Bill McKibben | 1995 | <i>Home, Human and Wild</i> |
| Paul Ehrlich et al. | 1995 | <i>The Stork and the Plow</i> |
| Wuppertal Institute | 1995 | <i>Towards a Sustainable Europe</i> |
| M. Wackernagel & W. Rees | 1995 | <i>Our Ecological Footprint</i> |
| Richard Norgaard | 1994 | <i>Development Betrayed</i> |
| Cliff Cobb and Ted Halstead | 1994 | <i>The Genuine Progress Indicator</i> |
| Paul Hawkin | 1994 | <i>The Ecology of Commerce</i> |
| David Pepper | 1993 | <i>Eco-Socialism: from Deep Ecology to Social Justice</i> |
| Wolfgang Sachs | 1993 | <i>Global Ecology: A New Arena of Political Conflict</i> |
| D. Meadows & D. Meadows | 1992 | <i>Beyond the Limits</i> |
| Alan Durning | 1992 | <i>How Much Is Enough?</i> |
| Joe Dominguez & Vicki Robin | 1992 | <i>Your Money or Your Life</i> |
| Al Gore | 1992 | <i>Earth in the Balance</i> |
| Richard Douthwaite | 1992 | <i>The Growth Illusion</i> |
| Carolyn Merchant | 1992 | <i>Radical Ecology</i> |
| Paul Ekins | 1992 | <i>Green Economics</i> |
| Jerry Mander | 1991 | <i>In the Absence of the Sacred</i> |
| Lester Brown et al. | 1991 | <i>Saving the Planet</i> |
| Bill Devall | 1990 | <i>Simple in Means, Rich in Ends</i> |
| Herman Daly, John Cobb Jr. | 1989 | <i>For the Common Good</i> |
| Bill McKibben | 1989 | <i>The End of Nature</i> |
| Earthworks Press | 1989 | <i>50 Simple Things You Can Do To Save The Earth</i> |
| Lester Milbrath | 1989 | <i>Envisioning A Sustainable Society</i> |
| Stephen Schneider | 1989 | <i>Global Warming</i> |
| Bill Devall, George Sessions | 1988 | <i>Deep Ecology: Living as if Nature Mattered</i> |
| Thomas Berry | 1988 | <i>The Dream of the Earth</i> |
| World Commission on Environment & Development | 1987 | <i>Our Common Future</i> |
| Brian Tokar | 1987 | <i>The Green Alternative: Creating an Ecological Future</i> |
| Fritjof Capra and Charlene Spretnack | 1984 | <i>Green Politics</i> |
| Rudolph Bahro | 1984 | <i>From Red to Green</i> |
| Jonathan Porritt | 1984 | <i>Seeing Green: The Politics of Ecology Explained</i> |

(more...)

BOX IIC-1. Fifty Years of Green Sustainability: A history in texts (cont'd.)

| | | |
|-------------------------|------|--|
| Die Gruenen | 1983 | <i>Program of the German Green Party</i> |
| Fritjof Capra | 1982 | <i>The Turning Point</i> |
| Murray Bookchin | 1982 | <i>The Ecology of Freedom</i> |
| Lester Brown | 1981 | <i>Building a Sustainable Society</i> |
| Duane Elgin | 1981 | <i>Voluntary Simplicity</i> |
| Andre Gorz | 1980 | <i>Ecology as Politics</i> |
| Kirkpatrick Sale | 1980 | <i>Human Scale</i> |
| Carolyn Merchant | 1980 | <i>The Death of Nature</i> |
| Theodore Rozak | 1979 | <i>Person/Planet</i> |
| Warren Johnson | 1979 | <i>Muddling Toward Frugality</i> |
| Farallones Institute | 1979 | <i>The Integral Urban House</i> |
| James Lovelock | 1979 | <i>GAIA: A New Look At Life On Earth</i> |
| Peter Berg, ed. | 1978 | <i>Reinhabiting a Separate Country</i> |
| William Ophuls | 1977 | <i>Ecology and the Politics of Scarcity</i> |
| Amory Lovins | 1976 | <i>Energy Strategy: The Road Not Taken</i> |
| Ernest Callenbach | 1975 | <i>Ecotopia</i> |
| Annie Dillard | 1974 | <i>Pilgrim at Tinker Creek</i> |
| Robert Heilbroner | 1974 | <i>An Inquiry into the Human Prospect</i> |
| E.F. Schumacher | 1973 | <i>Small is Beautiful</i> |
| Herman Daly | 1973 | <i>Toward a Steady-State Economy</i> |
| Edward Goldsmith et al. | 1972 | <i>Blueprint for Survival</i> |
| Donella Meadows et al. | 1972 | <i>The Limits to Growth</i> |
| Francis Moore Lappé | 1971 | <i>Diet for a Small Planet</i> |
| Nicolas Georgescu-Rogen | 1971 | <i>The Entropy Law and the Economic Process</i> |
| Barry Commoner | 1971 | <i>The Closing Circle: Nature, Man, and Technology</i> |
| Charles Reich | 1970 | <i>The Greening of America</i> |
| Theodore Rozak | 1970 | <i>The Making of a Counter-Culture</i> |
| Steward Brand, et al. | 1968 | <i>The Whole Earth Catalogue</i> |
| Garret Hardin | 1968 | <i>The Tragedy of the Commons</i> |
| Paul Ehrlich | 1968 | <i>The Population Bomb</i> |
| Barbara Ward | 1966 | <i>Spaceship Earth</i> |
| Stuart Udall | 1963 | <i>The Quiet Crisis</i> |
| Rachel Carson | 1962 | <i>Silent Spring</i> |
| Harrison Brown | 1954 | <i>The Challenge of Man's Future</i> |
| Aldo Leopold | 1949 | <i>A Sand County Almanac</i> |

BOX IIC-2 THE “TEN KEY VALUES” OF THE GREENS

source: O'aht-Ka Green Party Genesee Valley Region, New York State
<http://vader.boutell.com/seagreens/TextOnly/Values/index.html>

Ecological Wisdom: The Greens recognize that the Earth sustains all life processes. Green ecology moves beyond environmentalism by understanding the common roots of the exploitation of nature and the exploitation of people.

Social Justice: Greens oppose the worldwide system of poverty and injustice, and are working to end oppression based on class, sex, race, citizenship, age, or sexual orientation.

Grassroots Democracy: Greens believe that the power concentrated in big business and big government must be returned to the people. We believe in direct participation by all people in the environmental, political and economic decisions that affect their lives.

Non-Violence: Greens reject violence as a way of settling disputes--it's shortsighted, morally wrong, and ultimately self-defeating. We are working to create a society where war is obsolete.

Decentralization: Power and responsibility must be restored to local communities, within an overall framework of ecologically sound, socially just values and ways of living.

Community-Based Economics: Greens seek a new economics based upon the natural limits of the Earth, which meets the basic needs of everyone on the planet, and is under democratic, decentralized community control.

Feminism: The Green movement is profoundly inspired by feminism. The ethics of cooperation and understanding must replace the values of domination and control.

Respect For Diversity: We honor the biological diversity of the Earth, and the cultural, sexual, and spiritual diversity of Earth's people. We aim to reclaim this country's finest ideals: popular democracy, the dignity of the individual, and liberty and justice for all.

Personal And Global Responsibility: Greens are committed to global sustainability through both political solidarity and of living based on ecological principals that respect our bioregion.

Future Focus: Like the Iroquois Indians, Greens seek a society where the interests of the seventh generation are considered equal to the interests of the present. We must reclaim the future for ourselves and our children.

BOX IIC-3. Criteria for “Being Green”

These are the criteria that Jonathon Porrit, Chair of the UK’s Green Party, lists as his personal assessment of “the minimum” for “being green”. [source: *Seeing Green: the politics of ecology explained* (1984)]

- 1) A reverence for the earth and all its creatures
- 2) A willingness to share the world’s wealth among all its peoples; prosperity to be achieved through sustainable alternatives to the rat race of economic growth
- 3) Lasting security to be achieved through non-nuclear defense strategies and considerably reduced arms spending
- 4) A rejection of materialism and the destructive values of industrialism
- 5) Recognition of the rights of future generations in our use of all resources
- 6) An emphasis on socially useful, personally rewarding work, enhanced by human-scale technology
- 7) Protection of the environment and a precondition of a healthy society
- 8) An emphasis on personal growth and spiritual development
- 9) Respect for the gentler side of human nature
- 10) Open, participatory democracy at every level of society
- 11) Recognition of the crucial importance of significant reduction in population levels
- 12) Harmony between people of every race, color and creed
- 13) A non-nuclear, low-energy strategy, based on conservation, greater efficiency and renewable sources
- 14) An emphasis on self-reliance and de-centralized communities

As considered here, the scenario of Green Sustainability is strongly shaped by its belief that objective limits-to-growth will necessitate a transition to a steady-state economy, and that the sooner this process can begin, the less disruptive this transition will be. **IIC-4** documents this element of the Green sustainability scenario.

Is Green sustainability a credible, compelling scenario for the future? In order to assess this it's important to be honest about its full implications. **IIC-5** lists features that William Ophuls proposes would characterize a steady-state society. The authoritarian, hierarchical elements of this steady-state society are strongly at odds with the democratic and decentralist elements that figure prominently in the vision of Green sustainability expressed in Boxes IIC-2 and IIC-3.²

This conflict gets to the heart of the major reason why it may be difficult for Green sustainability to serve as the core advocated scenario for the global future. A steady-state world is one in which essentially all people consume not more than some agreed upon or allotted sustainable level of resources and/or output. Such an outcome can be achieved either voluntarily or authoritatively. For it to happen voluntarily would require that all people come to know, adopt and strongly internalize those values, beliefs and behaviors necessary to support the steady-state regime. A world in which 90% of the population live in accord with steady-state norms, but 10% do not, may be a slow growth world, but it is not a steady-state world, and it is a world in which the power and influence of the non-cooperators will grow. A truly steady-state economy requires cooperation from very nearly 100% of consumers and producers.

How might this be expected to come about? Most of the literature on Green sustainability seems to imply that it will happen as people are educated about the issues and come to appreciate the stakes--in other words, through a process of rational choice. Other texts suggest that a mass societal conversion, at least on a par with mass religious conversions, would be needed to replace the symbolic structures, societal narratives and institutional arrangements of a

² Authority and hierarchy are even more dramatically at odds with the Green political *practice*, as anyone who has been involved in those efforts can attest.

BOX IIC-4. STEADY-STATE ECONOMICS AS NECESSITY

These excerpts document the central role played by the construction of biogeophysical limits to economic growth as a motivating element in the scenario of Green sustainability.

Ted Trainer (1996):

“[W]hether we like it or not we cannot define a sustainable society other than (as) a society based on simpler lifestyles, a high level of self-sufficiency, cooperation, and a zero growth economy... Whether or not it is unrealistic to ask people in general at this point in time to endorse such a society is not the focal issue. The crucial point is that *we have no choice* about these matters....” (p 163)

Warren Johnson (1979):

“[A]s a society, we might prefer to keep things the way they are now, but as time passes, this will not be an alternative.... We will have less and less choice but to turn toward frugality... The only real question, as far as I am able to discern, is whether we will move to it...efficiently and peacefully.” (pp 230-231)

William Ophuls (1977):

“If we will not freely and joyfully place ‘moral chains’ on our will and appetite, then we shall abdicate to the brute forces of nature or to a political Leviathan what should be our own moral duty... Only a life of self-restraint and simple sufficiency in natural harmony with the earth will allow us to continue to enjoy life, liberty and estate.” (p 244)

BOX IIC-5. SOCIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF A STEADY-STATE WORLD

[sources: Ophuls, 1977,1992]

Modesty: “Once the getting and spending of material wealth have ceased to be the prime determinant of status and self-esteem, the search for social satisfaction and personal fulfillment can turn towards the artistic, cultural, spiritual intellectual and scientific spheres.”

Politics: “... the market orientation typical of most modern societies will have to be strictly governed.”

Stewardship: “...we shall move away from the values of growth, profligacy and exploitation... towards sufficiency, frugality and stewardship. Stewardship...will become the cardinal virtue of ecological economics...The steady-state need not involve joyless self-abnegation, for they would be participating in a deeply satisfying civilization task. Learning to live with scarcity does not mean learning to live without... Yet it must be acknowledged that many people living today might not share this sanguine assessment...”

Diversity: “The pressures of ecological scarcity urge upon us technological pluralism... limitations of energy and material use seem likely to lessen substantially the current high degree of homogenization, centralization and interdependence.”

Holism: “There will be a decisive move away from scientific reductionism... toward holism, the assumption that nature is best understood by focusing on the interrelationships...”

Communalism: “...the traditional primacy of the community over the individual that has characterized virtually every other period of history will be restored... Rigid caste systems and inflexible feudal hierarchies are unlikely to be necessary, but the degree of individual subordination that will be required would probably seem insupportable to many living today.”

Authority: “...we shall necessarily move from liberty toward authority, for the community will have to be able to enforce its demands on individuals...”

Government: [There will be] “... a movement away from egalitarian democracy towards political competence and status. ...to the extent that a class of Jeffersonian natural aristocrats is still needed to make the system work, it could be subject to constitutional restraints...”

Morality: “It seems extremely unlikely that a real commitment to stewardship could arise out of enlightened self-interest; it will require a change of heart... the steady-state society, like virtually all other human civilizations except modern industrialism, will almost certainly have a religious basis...”

growth-oriented industrial society with new ones appropriate for a no-growth, sustainable society.³

If neither of these means are able to assure universal adoption of behaviors compatible with a steady-state world, then overtly authoritative structures would be necessary. Of course, the vision of a sustainable society that Ophuls, Daly and Cobb, and others propose is hardly that of an eco-fascist police state. They envision a benign society characterized by a level of individual, social and spiritual maturity and ecological understanding that precludes the need for most grossly authoritative constraints. However, this society would also have to be able to act effectively in those circumstances when the survival of humankind might be threatened by individuals or groups that fail to cooperate.

Given the apparent necessity of either mass religio-spiritual conversion, or authoritarianism, it's perhaps no surprise that Green sustainability does not have a larger following. Any truly mass appeal that Green sustainability might have would appear to rest heavily on the plausibility of the limits-to-growth critique. If that critique is felt to be strong, then authoritarianism and hierarchy can be accepted as necessary evils. If that critique is felt to be flawed, then a major portion of the rationale for the scenario of Green sustainability is weakened. And as we saw in Section II.A, it is difficult to make a convincing case that limits-to-growth need necessarily impair moderate levels of economic growth for at least the next 150 years, and perhaps longer.

Is it possible that people might be attracted to the scenario of Green sustainability even in the absence of necessity imposed by limits-to-growth? Certainly, many people are attracted by a vision that calls for less material striving, more cooperative human relations, more spiritual depth, and greater appreciation of nature. The important questions are: how many people? Coming from what economic circumstances? If large numbers are attracted to such a vision on its own

³ See Ophuls' final point in IIC-5, and the quote from Daly and Cobb in Section II.B.3.d concerning their religious commitment.

terms, then the argument from necessity is unneeded. But so long as a minority of persons do *not* agree to live lives of frugality, cooperation, spiritual growth, etc., then the scenario itself is not realizable, as noted above. At the present time the number of people who hold to the values of Green sustainability, and express these values in their life decisions, and for whom the prospects of limits-to-growth are *not* an important consideration, is probably very small. By itself that doesn't disqualify Green sustainability as a practicable global scenario--the real world expression of any alternative scenario will initially be small. The important question is: at what rate can we credibly expect that people in different countries and from all walks of life will come to adopt the values that support a global regime of Green sustainability, in the absence of expected objective constraints?

In order to help evaluate prospective levels of support for the critically challenging elements of the Green scenario, the following two sections review the results of public opinion surveys.

In section C.2 we review surveys concerning environmental protection, with particular attention to how strongly people feel about the environment in comparison with other issues, and how they weigh possible tradeoffs between environmental and economic concerns.

In section C.3 we report the results of a survey of participants at a major conference on voluntary simplicity, held in Los Angeles in September of 1998. The tenets of the voluntary simplicity movement overlap strongly with those ascribed in these notes to Green sustainability. Further, the voluntary simplicity movement has as its focus encouraging and supporting people in actually living their lives in ways that are consistent with professed values of sustainability. The survey was intended to find out what voluntary simplicity meant to the conference participants, what demographic and other factors characterized the participants, and how participants felt about tradeoffs between consumption, economic growth, and equity.

In the final section, C.4, we consider the results from the three previous sections, and conclude with an assessment of the credibility of Green sustainability as an advocated scenario.