

Environmentalism and the Decline of the West

by Walter Starck

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Most of the leading Western Nations are now experiencing ageing populations, declining industries, chronic trade imbalances, bloated government, punitive taxation, high levels of personal debt, unsustainable government deficits and a rapidly metastasizing regulatory regime that is an increasing impediment to any productive activity.

All this has grown over time into a vast interrelated morass of problems which will require fundamental changes in governance to correct. Simply more tweaking of the existing structure will only add to the problems. Correcting them demands more radical treatment.

This probably can't happen until the existing structure has collapsed; however, such time appears closer every day. A wave of sovereign defaults followed by a severe global economic depression seems virtually assured by rapidly compounding debt which is now reaching levels which only an improbably miraculous recovery could overcome.

When the time does arrive that real reform becomes possible it will be important to understand how we got ourselves into such a mess in order to decide what to do to get out of it. Too much government is obviously a core problem. Imposing more clearly defined limits on what we expect of it plus more secure limits on what it may legitimately do is going to be important.

In addition to setting new limits on government it will also be important to more clearly recognise the social and behavioural forces which have driven government in the direction it has taken. Without such understanding there is a high risk of starting afresh at considerable pain only to repeat the same kind of mistakes and end up in a similar situation again.

A major contributor to our current societal malaise has been a tendency to moral crusades which have only exacerbated the problems they were intended to fix while generating an ongoing residue of collateral damage, unintended consequences, bureaucracy and repression. Over the past century major initiatives of this nature have included prohibition, the war on drugs, the war on terror and repeated efforts to impose or repress various political ideologies.

Although all these efforts have inflicted great suffering and socio-economic damage, probably none have resulted in such ongoing, widespread and ever increasing detriment as has environmentalism. While the benefits of cleaner air and water have been apparent and undeniable, the damage inflicted by misguided environmentalism has been largely unrecognised even though massively extensive and deleterious to human wellbeing.

This damage has included direct impacts and benefits prevented as well as the more indirect effects of repression and loss of freedom and opportunity:

Some Direct Damages of Misguided Environmentalism

1. Tens of millions of deaths and debilitating infections by malaria which could have been prevented by indoor use of DDT with minimal environmental impact.
2. Destruction of millions of Ha of rainforest to grow biofuels for an immeasurably trivial reduction in CO₂ emissions.
3. It has been estimated that as many as 20 million people have been robbed of their lands and forced into poverty as conservation refugees. After millennia of harmonious co-existence with their natural environment they have been driven out to “protect” it.
4. Even in developed countries multitudes of honest, productive families of small farmers, stockmen and fishermen have also been stripped of a long standing sustainable livelihood to pander to the uninformed notions of green urbanites.
5. In recent years significant increases in food prices have resulted from large areas of land being removed from food production in order to grow uneconomic subsidised biofuels. In addition food production has suffered from reductions in water rights, prohibition of native vegetation clearance, expansion of parks along with myriad environmental restrictions and demands that reduce productivity or increase cost with little or no actual environmental benefit. A further direct consequence has been an increase in malnutrition, especially in underdeveloped countries dependent on staple food imports. This affects tens of millions of people and the trend is getting worse not better.
6. One of the more serious effects of misguided environmentalism has also been the corruption of science. This is resulting in a marked dulling of our most effective tool for informed decision making at a time when it is needed more than ever to deal with an increasingly complex world. In the environmental sciences repeated exposures of junk science and concerted scientific misconduct along with exaggerated predictions which fail their reality test have damaged public trust in all science. Lavish funding for agenda driven junk science has also resulted in a virtual abandonment of sound basic research in favour of research aimed at promoting the existence of purported threats.

Benefits Denied through Environmentalism

1. Ignorance and ill-founded fears about genetically modified crops has prevented their introduction in many places. While reasonable prudence is warranted in the adoption of this powerful technology, its blanket prohibition is unwarranted by extensive experience as well as our best scientific understanding. The benefits of increased production, disease resistance, and nutritional improvements as well as the reduced use of fertilisers, pesticides and herbicides are huge. They amount to hundreds of billions of dollars per year in addition to more and better food for billions of people.

2. Unbelievably the GMO hysteria has extended even to the rejection of food aid in a famine in Africa because of concerns about it possibly containing GM material. Apparently the eco-logic is that it is better to starve than to risk an undefined possibility of some unhealthy effect from eating GM food which is consumed by hundreds of millions of people elsewhere with no adverse consequences known.
3. The energy from fossil fuels is the very foundation of modern society and its rising cost is now having a damaging economic impact on all developed economies. Despite its vital importance, however, increasing imposts, restrictions and liabilities have become a major impediment to production. It appears probable that we are headed for a severe energy crisis including some nations with large natural reserves such as the U.S. and Australia. Certainly the increasing cost of energy is already having a significant negative impact on the prosperity of millions of people even in the most prosperous nations.
4. Although aquaculture has been highly successful in producing affordable high quality animal protein with minimal environmental detriment it has also become subject to increasing restrictions, prohibitions and costs imposed on the basis of ill-founded environmental concerns. At the same time recent large scale clinical and epidemiological studies have found strong correlation between increased seafood consumption and significant health benefits. These encompass a broad spectrum of major disorders including cardiovascular diseases, a variety of immune related disorders and neurological development and functioning. There is strong indication that increased seafood consumption in most Western nations could save billions of dollars annually in health care costs along with a greatly improved quality of life for tens of millions of people. Although globally there is limited potential for further increasing production in wild caught fisheries, there is great potential for expanded aquaculture. The only real impediment is misguided environmentalism.

Repression and loss of freedom and opportunity imposed by environmentalism

1. Hunting, fishing and camping for recreational and food supplementation purposes have long been healthy activities open to people of all ages and social classes. Over the past few decades, however, increasingly harsh, restrictive, complex and costly regulations enacted under the banner of environmental management have taken much of the fun as well as the affordability out of these activities.
2. Strong property rights have been a core element of long standing in the development of Western democracies. A person's home has been their castle and private property was indeed private. However, that is now history. The new eco-fascism is busy imposing myriad restrictions and demands regarding what one can, cannot and must do on one's own land. Land ownership is becoming more a matter of onerous, ever increasing and arbitrary obligations than of any secure rights. Land holding is effectually in the process of being transformed into a new form of serfdom with the state as the true owner and the liege lord to whom all obligations must be paid and permissions sought.
3. For millennia fishermen were among the freest of people, the industry was open to anyone and the price of entry was only time and effort. The ideal of fisheries management was to maximise the sustainable yield. Then came the development of

academically trained office based eco-management conducted by experts in theoretical ideas about things they have never seen and about which little is actually known. Management claims have expanded to include the entire marine ecosystem with a focus on the maintenance of species diversity and community resiliency while protecting from an endless array of possible threats, all with an eye to erring on the side of precaution. The favourite tool has become the computer model which can be readily adjusted to provide any desired result, lends an aura of high tech certainty and is safely inaccessible to independent examination. The freedom to fish has been transformed into privatised, corporatized, tradable rights accompanied by blizzards of paperwork. The result has been a declining industry with ageing participants and no new generation coming on to replace them. The rights to the most valuable fisheries are all becoming the private property of corporations and investors to be fished by struggling share croppers who bear all the risk and effort but enjoy only a minority of the profit.

The inverse relation of environmentalism and productivity -

While concern for the environment has unquestionably resulted in valuable benefits from pollution reduction, preservation of nature and more sustainable utilisation of natural resources; it has also spawned the development of environmentalism as a malignant ideological offshoot with far less benign consequences. Environmentalism has become both a powerful political lever putting dangerous power in the hands of ignorance as well as a convenient cloak for sundry hidden agendas. That it has cost tens of millions of lives, hundreds of billions of dollars and had significant impacts on health, prosperity, freedom and enjoyment of life over much of the world is all too real even if still largely unrecognised.

In most developed nations a large majority of the population now dwell in cities and only a minority toil to produce the goods and services which support us all. For many urbanites in particular the environment has acquired a romantic, somewhat sacred, status. Though themselves voracious consumers, they are removed from the production that supplies their demands. Those who provide their needs tend to be seen as greedy exploiters and defilers of nature. Even more ironically, their own lifestyle has virtually annihilated the natural world in a small portion of the environment and that is where they choose to live.

Environmental delusions and deceptions -

The reality of a constant struggle for survival in a dynamic, ever changing, often harsh natural world has been replaced by a romantic notion of nature in a blissful state of harmony and balance, something pure and perfect where any detectable human influence is by definition a desecration. This sacred perspective of the environment manifests itself in language where fragile and delicate become almost mandatory adjectives in describing the natural world.

An unholy coalition of politicians, activists, bureaucrats, academics, and the media have found it profitable to feed into and use the urban eco-delusions for sundry other agendas. For the politicians it affords a cheap shop at green votes. For activists it's campaigns that attract public attention and donations. For bureaucrats it's increased authority and budgets. For academics it's grants and recognition. For the media it's the attention grabbing drama of threats and conflicts.

Like every effective propaganda machine environmentalism has created it's own special terms of emotional index designed to trigger reflexive notions of good and evil. Terms such as sustainable, biodiversity, ecosystem-based management, ecologically sustainable development, modelled, precautionary, overexploited, threatened, endangered, deniers and even the very words environment and ecology have been co-opted and associated with desired connotations to serve as buzz words.

A peculiar adjunct of all this has been the enshrinement of an imaginary precautionary principle concocted to mandate that any suggestion of a detrimental environmental effect must be addressed with full measures to prevent it. Its formulation makes no reference to probability, cost, or risks and it offers a ready cloak for sundry other agendas. Logically it would even preclude itself as everything we do or don't do entails risk, including precautionary measures themselves. Amazingly, this vacuous and pernicious piece of nonsense has even been written into the enabling legislation of various government agencies charged with various facets of environmental management.

To make matters worse, environmentalism has also become heavily infected with the intellectual malignancy of political correctness wherein certain attitudes, beliefs and perspectives are deemed to be so unarguably true and proper as to be beyond any questioning or critical examination. To attempt to do so is not simply to be mistaken. It is evidence of moral degeneration and wilful evil.

This then brings us to the mother of all environmental threats, Anthropogenic Global Warming (a.k.a. Climate Change). AGW has been the eco-saviour's ultimate wet dream. In the short term it has afforded healthy portions of fame, fortune, authority and great righteousness. Further along it promises to save the world, punish unbelievers and bring about a fair, harmonious, balanced, sustainable restoration of Eden. The fact that all such dreams of ideal societies have had a 100% track record of failure is not even a consideration. To the faithful every time, this time is always different and each time the believers are certain they "know" the truth and surely couldn't be wrong because it is confirmed by all their fellow believers and politically correct as well.

Ecology is above all holistic -

Every organism must have effects in order to exist. We are no exception. Aiming to maximise our beneficial effects and minimise our detrimental ones requires trade-offs and adjustments whereby we seek to spread our impacts across our whole resource base within the bounds of sustainability.

Every resource we lock up puts more pressure on others and makes genuine sustainability more difficult. An unnecessary restriction in one place becomes an increased impact somewhere else.

The reality of natural ecosystems is that they are far less delicate, fragile and balanced than is popularly imagined. They are in fact much more robust, dynamic and fluctuating with every organism impacting on others. Like all species the effect of our own can be either harmful or beneficial depending upon whether the net result is to decrease or to enhance the diversity, abundance and condition of life.

Environmentalism tends to view every accidental condition of nature as manifesting some beneficent balance but any evidence of a human influence as an unnatural impact. This perspective is baseless, irrational and is itself unnatural. Our species like all the others is a natural result of the evolution of life on this planet. Our rather sudden and amazing success after such a long, hard and often doubtful struggle is something to marvel about and be grateful for, not something to be disparaged.

Approaching the end times -

Unfortunately mass delusions with moralistic overtones have a way of continuing well beyond the point where they have departed from any relation to reality. Deep commitment, pressure to conform and suppression of dissent may maintain them for some time even when their failure has become painfully obvious. If a powerful and respected leader finally dares to admit that serious problems exist, followers are then free to admit reality and the seemingly invulnerable bubble of delusion may abruptly collapse. The collapse of the communism is a prime example. However, if leaders have too much to lose to admit any error, a delusion may continue until mortality removes them or followers may simply fade away over time leaving only an empty shell of fossilised fanatics.

The climate change delusion is now in its terminal battle with reality. The proclamations of the alarmists are growing more and more unhinged from the actual climate in which we exist. Increasingly costly and restricted energy supplies are having growing impact on people's lives. Green energy has failed miserably to deliver cheap, adequate and reliable power or to result in any meaningful reduction in CO₂ emissions. It exists only because of subsidies which render it an indulgence we can no longer afford. Then, to top everything off, the science on which all the claims have been based has been repeatedly exposed as corrupted by incompetence, inappropriate methods, unexplained adjustments to data, cherry picking of evidence, exaggeration, suppressing or ignoring conflicting findings and even outright fraud.

Where to from here-

The threat of catastrophic climate change has almost certainly been greatly exaggerated and the net effect of increased CO₂ in the atmosphere is much more likely to be beneficial than harmful. A growing majority of the public now reject the alarmism. After it collapses, or just withers away to irrelevance, we will be left with a need to better understand how the science became so corrupted.

There are several aspects in this regard about which we should begin thinking:

1. The current system of peer review is overrated and corrupt. The Internet makes possible a much more widely based, open and transparent approach.
2. Scientific training and practice is lacking in a clear understanding and implementation of the philosophy and ethics of science.
3. Government funding of research has become dominated by political agendas wherein support is awarded in accord with the production of desired findings.
4. Researchers, managers and activists in the environmental area have learned to manufacture hypothetical threats to obtain funding. With the precautionary principle

no demonstrable problem is required, only the suggestion of a possible one.

5. A properly structured and resourced science court is needed to evaluate important scientific claims and disputes before public policies are based on them.

Unfortunately the corruption is not restricted to science itself. Junk science is now being widely indoctrinated throughout the educational system. Instead of teaching students how to recognise and evaluate such malignant righteousness, they are being presented it as unquestionable truth.

In developed nations Virtually all productive activity now faces a morass of environmental regulations imposed through a multitude of different government bodies. The difficulties, delays, costs and uncertainties are having a major impact. More and more businesses are giving up altogether or moving offshore. For many who do try to go ahead or who are already committed the eco-demands result in marginal profitability. This trend is getting worse, not better, and it is already having a significant impact on national prosperity. For multinational companies it just means squeezing out what profit they can from their investment and diverting future expansion elsewhere. For increasing numbers of domestic businesses already at the margin of profitability it simply means closing down.

Moral crusades have a repeated history of imposing pain and ending in grief. There is nothing to indicate this one is any different. It's time to recognise it for what it is, consign it to the rubbish bin of history and begin thinking about how to undo the damage.

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