

Nature's Laws No Longer Apply

...because we Homo sapiens have become 'exemptional'

CHRIS CLUGSTON

The vast majority of industrialized humanity presumes without thought or question that our industrial lifestyle paradigm — the way of life that we in the industrialized world consider “normal” — will persist indefinitely. While seldom stated explicitly, this unquestioned presumption permeates our worldview and is transmitted reflexively as an integral part of our “cultural DNA.”

The following excerpt from my forthcoming book, *Blip — humanity's self-terminating experiment with industrialism*, invalidates this presumption by dispelling four prevalent myths pertaining to our industrialized existence and our relationship with Nature.

MYTH 1: BESIDES BEING EXCEPTIONAL¹, WE HOMO SAPIENS ARE ALSO EXEMPTIONAL²

Through physical evolution, *Homo sapiens* has become “exceptional” among Earth species — we are cognitively and intellectually superior to all other life forms inhabiting planet Earth.

Furthermore, owing to our unparalleled human ingenuity — i.e., human resourcefulness, technical prowess, efficiency, and productivity — industrialized humanity has evolved culturally to the point where we can adapt to the vicissitudes of Nature, harness the forces of Nature, and overcome the onslaughts of Nature.³

Chris Clugston holds an MBA/Finance with High Distinction from Temple University, and has worked for 40 years in the high technology/electronics industry. Chris held management level positions in marketing, sales, finance, and mergers and acquisitions, prior to becoming a corporate chief executive and later a management consultant. Since 2005, Chris has conducted extensive independent research into the area of “sustainability,” with a focus on Nonrenewable Natural Resource (NRR) scarcity. NRRs are the fossil fuels, metals, and nonmetallic minerals that enable humanity's industrialized existence.

Accordingly, industrialized humanity has become “exemptional” — we have transcended the limitations imposed by Nature upon “lesser species” and pre-industrial humanity. Self-imposed political, economic, and societal constraints are the only remaining barriers to unlimited human prosperity and progress.

REALITY 1: WE HOMO SAPIENS ARE ARGUABLY EXCEPTIONAL, BUT NOT EXEMPTIONAL

While we differ in “degree” from other Earth species, we do not differ in “kind.” As is the case with all other Earth species, industrialized *Homo sapiens*’ “success” is enabled and constrained by the mix and levels of Earth resources — natural habitats, renewable natural resources, and nonrenewable natural resources — available to us.

Natural Habitat (NH): a naturally occurring subsystem of Earth's planetary ecosystem within which the constituent biotic and abiotic entities exist in a self-managing equilibrium. NH regenerates over time, either intermittently or cyclically, through naturally occurring biogeochemical processes. Aquatic, terrestrial, and atmospheric habitats such as wetlands, rivers, oceans, timberlands, grasslands, deserts, and tundra are essential to all species, including *Homo sapiens*, as providers of essential ecosystem services such as freshwater provisioning and waste decomposition.

Renewable Natural Resource (RNR): a naturally occurring component of Earth's planetary ecosystem that replenishes over time, either intermittently or cyclically, through naturally occurring biogeochemical processes. RNRs — i.e., atmosphere, water, soil, and naturally occurring biota — enable all life on Earth.

Nonrenewable Natural Resource (NRR): a naturally occurring component of Earth's planetary ecosystem that does not replenish on a timescale that is relevant from the perspective of “human time,” in the event that it replenishes at all. The biogeochemical processes by which NNR reserves replenish take place in geological time, over millions or billions of years. NNRs — fossil fuels, metals, and nonmetallic minerals — serve as the raw material inputs to our industrialized economies, the building blocks that comprise our industrialized infra-

structure and societal support systems, and the primary energy sources that power our industrialized societies. NNRs enable humanity’s industrialized existence.

During the 250-plus years since the inception of our industrial revolution, as we have viewed the world increasingly from our narrow anthropocentric (human-centered) perspective,⁴ we have mistakenly come to believe that we are not only superior to all other Earth species, but that we are superior to Nature as well — i.e., through human ingenuity, we have transcended the natural limits that apply to all species, except *Homo sapiens*.

In actuality, when viewed from the broader eco-centric (Nature-centered) perspective,⁵ all Earth species, including *Homo sapiens*, are constituent elements in the web of life, and are subject to Nature’s universally applicable and inviolable laws of sustainable Earth resource utilization behavior:

Natural habitat (NH) net degradation (overexploitation) is unsustainable — the level of degradation inflicted by Earth species on a habitat cannot exceed the level of habitat regeneration effectuated by naturally occurring biogeochemical processes. Persistent habitat net degradation inevitably causes habitat destruction, which renders the habitat unable to provide life support services to indigenous species.

Renewable natural resource (RNR) net depletion (overexploitation) is unsustainable — the level of depletion perpetrated by Earth species on an RNR reserve cannot exceed the level of RNR replenishment effectuated by naturally occurring biogeochemical processes. Persistent RNR net depletion inevitably causes resource exhaustion, which renders the RNR unable to support dependent species.

Nonrenewable natural resource (NNR) depletion (exploitation) is unsustainable⁶ — because NNRs are not replenished on a time scale that is relevant from the perspective of “human time,” any and all NNR depletion equates to net depletion. Persistent NNR depletion, especially at levels required to perpetuate human industrialized existence, inevitably causes resource exhaustion, which renders the NNR unable to support dependent species.

The immutable limits imposed by Nature on all Earth species, including industrialized *Homo sapiens*, are biogeochemically determined and cannot be subverted, evaded, or transcended. This reality is especially problematic for humankind, given that our industrialized existence is enabled by finite and non-replenishing NNRs.

MYTH 2: HUMANITY’S INDUSTRIALIZED WAY OF LIFE IS ‘NORMAL’

The extraordinary way of life to which we in the industrialized world have become accustomed is “nor-

mal.” It is reasonable to expect that *Homo sapiens*, Earth’s exceptional species, would enjoy an extraordinary way of life, characterized by continuously improving societal well-being — i.e., an expanding population, increasing economic output, and improving material living standards.

Our industrial lifestyle paradigm is simply a normal phase in humanity’s extraordinary evolutionary development.

REALITY 2: HUMANITY’S INDUSTRIALIZED WAY OF LIFE IS AN UNPRECEDENTED ANOMALY.

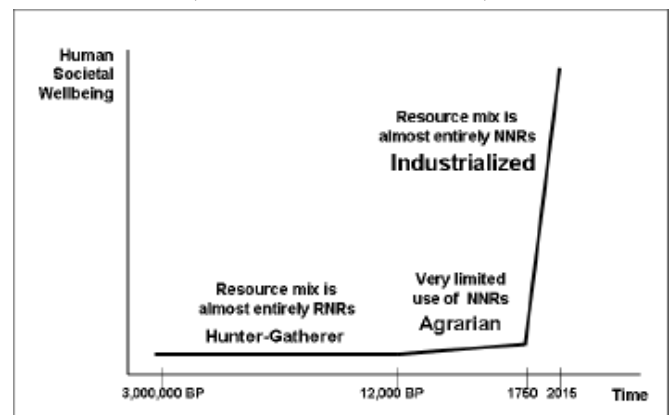
While industrialism is the only lifestyle paradigm familiar to those of us who are currently alive and to our immediate predecessors, it is not “normal.” Humanity’s industrialized existence is “abnormal” both in terms of Earth history and human history.

Life on Earth first appeared between 3.7 and 4.1 billion years ago,⁷ and nothing even remotely resembling humankind’s industrialized existence occurred prior to the inception of humanity’s industrial revolution less than 300 years ago. And while pre-industrial humanity existed for nearly 3,000,000 years — approximately 120,000 human generations — prior to the emergence of industrialism, industrialized humanity has existed for less than 300 years — fewer than 12 human generations.⁸

Given the extremely recent emergence of human industrialism, our industrial lifestyle paradigm can hardly be considered “normal” with respect to either Earth history or human history.

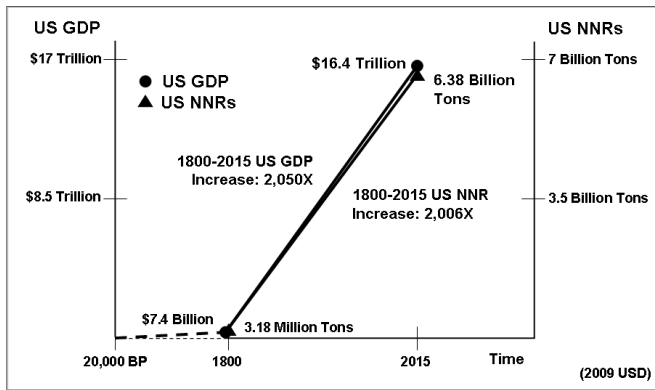
Moreover, industrialized *Homo sapiens* is unique among Earth species with respect to the natural resource mix that enables our existence. While the natural resource mix that supports non-human Earth species and that supported pre-industrial humankind consists almost entirely of RNRs, the natural resource mix that enables industrialized humanity’s existence consists almost entirely of NNRs.⁹

ENABLERS OF HUMAN SOCIETAL WELL-BEING (3,000,000 BP TO 2015)



The tightly linked causal relationship between industrialized humanity’s NNR utilization and our resulting economic output — a commonly used human societal well-being indicator — is clearly illustrated by America’s industrialization experience.

Between the years 1800 and 2015, total U.S. NNR utilization increased by over 2,000 times, from an estimated 3.18 million tons in 1800 to 6.38 billion tons in 2015. As a result of this spectacular increase in NNR utilization, U.S. economic output increased equally as spectacularly — by over 2,000 times — from an estimated \$7.4 billion in 1800 to \$16.4 trillion in 2015 (2009 USD).¹⁰



U.S. NNR UTILIZATION AND ECONOMIC OUTPUT (1800 TO 2015)

Given that humanity’s historically unprecedented industrialized existence is uniquely enabled by nonrenewable natural resources, our industrialized way of life can hardly be considered “normal.” In fact, only through our completely abnormal natural resource utilization behavior have we been able to attain our completely abnormal industrialized existence.

MYTH 3: HUMANITY’S INDUSTRIAL LIFESTYLE PARADIGM IS SUSTAINABLE INDEFINITELY

Humanity’s industrial lifestyle paradigm will exist in perpetuity, or until humankind evolves beyond industrialism to a superior, post-industrial lifestyle paradigm.

By being good stewards of our planet and by using Earth resources wisely, industrialized humanity will achieve “sustainable development,” “sustainable growth,” and a sustainable way of life, within which we will continue to improve the material living standards enjoyed by increasingly large segments of our ever-expanding global population.¹¹

REALITY 3: HUMANITY’S INDUSTRIAL LIFESTYLE PARADIGM: A WOEFULLY UNSUSTAINABLE ‘BLIP’

Since the inception of our industrial revolution over 250 years ago, we *Homo sapiens* have been deplet-

ing — persistently, increasingly, and irreversibly — the finite and non-replenishing NNRs upon which our industrialized way of life and our very existence depend.

Because this natural resource utilization behavior, which enables our species’ industrialized “success” — and that is essential to perpetuating that success — simultaneously undermines our species’ very existence, neither our natural resource utilization behavior nor our industrial lifestyle paradigm is sustainable. This is humanity’s “predicament.”¹²

Within the context of humanity’s industrial lifestyle paradigm, all contentions pertaining to “sustainable development,” “sustainable growth,” and “sustainable ‘anything’” are oxymoronic. The notion that we can somehow achieve a sustainable way of life through unsustainable natural resource utilization behavior — i.e., through the utilization of finite and non-replenishing NNRs — is absurd, and biogeochemically impossible.

MYTH 4: WE WILL LIVE HAPPILY EVER AFTER

Periods of future political instability, economic hardship, and social unrest are inevitable — locally, nationally, and globally — but these episodes of adversity will be brief and temporary. Resilient and ingenious *Homo sapiens* will always rebound from adversity stronger than ever.

Going forward, the only possible limits to human progress and prosperity entail lack of human imagination, ingenuity, and resolve. So long as we refrain from major self-imposed disasters such as nuclear war, all adversity can be weathered, all problems can be solved, and all barriers to human progress and prosperity can be overcome — every future human generation will be better off than the preceding generation.

REALITY 4: THERE IS NO HAPPY ENDING.

The consequence associated with our self-inflicted predicament — overshoot — is quite normal among Earth species.¹³ Unfortunately, in our case overshoot is terminal.¹⁴ Humanity’s unraveling is in process and will culminate in our global societal collapse — almost certainly by the year 2050.

UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES

It is not the case that humanity’s incessant quest for universal prosperity through global industrialization, and the associated unsustainable natural resource utilization behavior that enables our quest, are inherently evil. We have simply applied our boundless ingenuity over the past several centuries toward dramatically improving human societal well-being through ever-increasing NNR utilization.

It is the case, however, that despite humanity’s possibly justifiable naïveté during our meteoric ascent

to industrialized “exceptionalism,” and despite the fact that our predicament is undoubtedly an unintended consequence of our understandable efforts to continuously improve the material living standards enjoyed by our ever-expanding global population, remaining globally available, economically viable NNR supplies are not sufficient to perpetuate our industrial lifestyle paradigm.

Humanity’s fate was sealed during the eighteenth century with the advent of industrialism; the NNR genie had been released from the bottle and could not be put back. We remained oblivious to our fate throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries by misconstruing our windfall of temporary NNR abundance as permanent NNR sufficiency.

The episode of epidemic global NNR scarcity that we experienced during the early twenty-first century was a wakeup call to the fact that our industrial lifestyle paradigm is a one-time, NNR-enabled anomaly that is coming to an end.¹⁵

WE WILL BE SUSTAINABLE

Humanity’s transition to a sustainable lifestyle paradigm — a pre-industrial way of life within which a drastically reduced human population will experience subsistence level material living standards enabled exclusively by RNRs — is therefore inevitable. Our future is not about “whether we wish to be sustainable”; it is about “the process by which we will become sustainable.”

We can choose to discontinue our unsustainable natural resource utilization behavior during the next several decades and transition voluntarily to a sustainable lifestyle paradigm. In the process, humanity would cooperate globally in utilizing Earth’s remaining accessible NNRs to orchestrate a relatively gradual — but brutally painful nonetheless — transition to sustainability, thereby optimizing our population level and material living standards both during and after our transition.

Alternatively, we can choose to squander Earth’s increasingly scarce NNRs in a futile attempt to perpetuate our unsustainable industrial lifestyle paradigm — perhaps for a few decades at most. In the process, we would deplete remaining NNR reserves to levels at which globally available, economically viable NNR supplies become insufficient to enable our industrialized way of life, thereby causing an unimaginably painful involuntary transition to sustainability through global societal collapse.

HUMANITY’S DESTINY

Regrettably, humankind will not consider a voluntary transition to sustainability. As a species that has been conditioned over hundreds of years to expect

“continuously more and more,” we *Homo sapiens* will not willingly accept our new reality of “continuously less and less.”

Global humanity could not possibly agree upon methods by which to allocate equitably Earth’s increasingly scarce natural resources, and to reduce gracefully our global population and material living standards during the course of a voluntary transition to sustainability.

Rather, we will react with increasing desperation and continue to “pull out all the stops” in order to perpetuate our industrial lifestyle paradigm until it becomes impossible for us to do so — despite the fact that such a course of action represents the more horrific of our two alternatives.

Going forward, global competition for increasingly scarce NNRs and RNRs will devolve into increasingly debilitating resource wars, which will eventuate in global societal collapse through an immutable chain of ecological and economic events that is being driven by increasingly pervasive, geologically induced, global NNR scarcity:

Enormous and Ever-increasing Global NNR Requirements within the Context of Increasingly Scarce Economically Viable NNR Supplies →

Increasing NNR Prices →

Decreasing NNR Utilization →

Decreasing Economic Output →

Decreasing Material Living Standards →

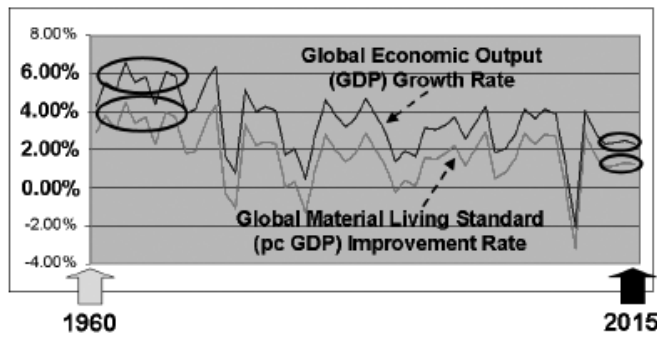
**Increasing Political, Economic,
and Societal Dysfunction →**

**Cascading National Collapses Devolving
into Global Societal Collapse**

NATURE BATS LAST

If we knew that our unraveling would commence in 1,000 years, 500 years, or even 100 years, we could dismiss it as a concern for future generations and continue to enjoy our industrialized way of life in the meantime. Unfortunately, our unraveling is occurring now.

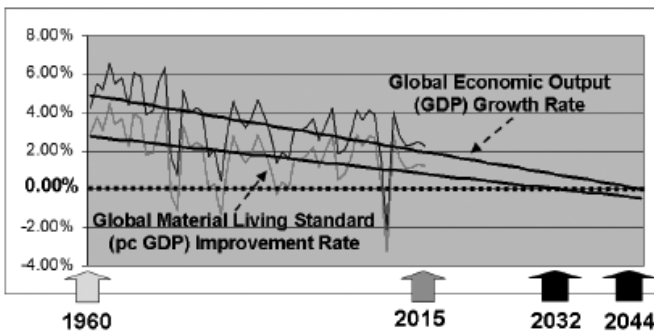
During the past 50 years, global humanity has experienced a transition from robustly increasing prosperity to anemically increasing prosperity. As relative NNR abundance has been displaced by increasingly pervasive global NNR scarcity, global GDP growth has plunged from a relatively vigorous 5 to 6 percent per annum during the 1960s to just above 2 percent currently; and annual global per capita GDP growth has decreased from a relatively robust 3 to 4 percent per annum during the 1960s to approximately 1.0 percent currently.¹⁶



FALTERING GLOBAL HUMAN PROSPERITY

Moreover, the probability that we will somehow discover and extract sufficient economically viable NNRs in the future to reverse these faltering global human prosperity trends is essentially zero — given that we have been unable to do so during the past 50 years, despite our unparalleled ingenuity, and given that our global NNR requirements remain enormous and ever-increasing.

The Great Recession of 2008/9 marked the beginning of global humanity’s Final Recession, which is ongoing and will intensify going forward, as global human prosperity continues to ratchet downward. So while temporary upticks in global GDP and per capita GDP growth rates are certainly possible during the near term, a return to persistently vigorous global economic growth and robustly improving material living standards is physically (geologically) impossible.



FUTURE GLOBAL HUMAN PROSPERITY

Should existing global human prosperity trends persist going forward, both global economic output (GDP) and global material living standards (per capita GDP) will peak and enter terminal decline by the year 2050. It is quite likely, however, that increasing social unrest resulting from continuously faltering human prosperity will cause our global economy and global society to completely unravel long before midcentury.

THE ‘SQUEEZE’ IS ON

Picture a vise tightening around the collective skulls of humanity in a relentless and remorseless “squeeze.” Because the handle of the vise turns at only

1/1000th of a revolution per day, the incremental pain is almost imperceptible on a day-to-day basis.

Over a 10-year period of time, however, the vise handle makes 3+ complete revolutions; over 20 years, 7+ revolutions; and over 30 years, 10+ revolutions... While the precise timing associated with the culmination of this squeeze scenario cannot be known with certainty, there can be no doubt regarding the final outcome — humanity will eventually crack.

Applying the squeeze metaphor to industrialized humanity:

The sad irony is it is we ourselves who are turning the vise handle! It is through our unsustainable natural resource utilization behavior — i.e., our persistent extraction and utilization of enormous quantities of finite, non-replenishing, and increasingly scarce NNRs — that our extraordinary yet unsustainable industrialized existence is enabled. So we’re damned if we do (continue to exploit NNRs in order to perpetuate our industrialized existence)...

The sadder irony is that we must continue to turn the handle!! In order to perpetuate our extraordinary yet unsustainable industrialized existence, we must persist in our unsustainable natural resource utilization behavior. And we’re damned if we don’t (continue to exploit NNRs in order to perpetuate our industrialized existence)...

Because the natural resource utilization behavior that enables our industrialized “success” simultaneously undermines our species’ very existence, we *Homo sapiens* are the inadvertent perpetrators of our self-inflicted predicament; and we are in the process of becoming the unwitting victims of our self-inflicted demise.

Regrettably, the squeeze is intensifying globally, and its manifestations are undeniable. The disenfranchised — the hundreds of millions who have attained some level of industrialized prosperity and are watching it slip away, and the denied — the billions who have aspired to industrialized prosperity and are realizing that they will never attain it — are becoming increasingly frustrated, angry, and violent.¹⁷

More regrettably, our circumstances will continue to deteriorate despite our incessant attempts to “fix” our geologically induced predicament with irrelevant political edicts, economic policies, and social reforms — none of which can possibly work because such anthropocentric expedients cannot create additional economically viable NNRs.

Most regrettably, as it becomes universally understood that life has become a “negative sum game” within the “shrinking pie” of “continuously less and less” —

i.e., that the only way to stay even within our contracting operating environment, much less to improve one's lot, is to take from someone else — the squeeze will culminate in humanity's self-inflicted global societal collapse, almost certainly by the year 2050.

All industrialized and industrializing nations, irrespective of their political ideologies, economic systems, and societal orientations, will collapse, taking the aid-dependent, non-industrialized nations with them.

Through industrialism, humanity set out to accomplish great things.

And we have accomplished great things.

Unfortunately, we have obviated ourselves in the process. ■

Endnotes

1. For an explanation of human “exceptionalism” and its derivation from the Dominant Western Worldview, see, “A New Ecological Paradigm for Post-Exuberant Sociology”; William R. Catton Jr. and Riley E. Dunlap; *American Behavioral Scientist*, Vol. 24 No.1, September/October 1980, pages 16-18. Specifically, “Western culture has a strong anthropocentric tradition, viewing humans as separate from and somehow above the rest of nature.” (page 16) – <http://abs.sagepub.com/content/24/1/15.extract>.
2. For an in-depth explanation of human “exemptionalism” and its origin, see, “A New Ecological Paradigm for Post-Exuberant Sociology”; pages 15-37. Specifically, “...we hardly wish to deny that *Homo sapiens* is an “exceptional” species. What we do deny is the belief that sociologists can still afford to suppose that the exceptional characteristics of our species exempt us from ecological principles and from environmental influences and constraints.” (page 25) — <http://abs.sagepub.com/content/24/1/15.extract>.
3. As used here, the term “Nature” refers to the continuously changing biophysical environment created by the countless naturally occurring biogeochemical phenomena that define and govern existence on Earth.
4. As used here, the term “anthropocentrism” refers to a narrow human-centered perspective that views and interprets reality in terms of human values, constructs, and experiences. Anthropocentrism maintains that *Homo sapiens* holds dominion over Nature, which exists to improve human societal well-being. For an overview of anthropocentrism, see <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anthropocentrism>.
5. As used here, the term “ecocentrism” refers to a broad Nature-centered perspective that views reality as a continuously evolving array of interdependent biogeochemical processes, phenomena, and entities. Ecocentrism maintains that *Homo sapiens* is but one of the countless Earth species encompassing the web of life, and that humankind is subject to the same natural laws as all other Earth species. For an overview of ecocentrism, see <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ecocentrism>.
6. Incidental NNR exploitation by non-human species and by pre-industrial humankind is considered “permissible,” although technically not sustainable. NNR exploitation of concern is that which occurs on an industrial scale — prodigious and persistent NNR extraction and utilization by NNR-dependent industrialized humanity — which is clearly unsustainable.
7. “Life,” *Wikipedia*; retrieved 12-2-16 – <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Life>.
8. “Fossil pushes back human origins 400,000 years,” Ann Gibbons, *Science Magazine*; 3-15-15 – <http://news.sciencemag.org/archaeology/2015/03/fossil-pushes-back-human-origins-400000-years>.
9. As an example of industrialized humanity's NNR dependence, NNRs comprise approximately 95% of the raw material inputs to the U.S. economy each year. “Economic Drivers of Mineral Supply,” *U.S. Geological Survey Open-File Report 02-335*, pg. 21, 2002 – Wagner, Lorie A., Sullivan, Daniel E., and Sznopce, John L. – <http://pubs.usgs.gov/of/2002/of02-335/of02-335.pdf>.
10. Estimated total U.S. NNR utilization for the year 1800: per capita U.S. mineral utilization in 1800 was approximately 1,200 pounds – <http://www.mineralseducationcoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/minerals1776vstoday.pdf>, times 5.3 million people, equals 3,018,000 tons of NNRs. Estimated total U.S. NNR utilization for the year 2015: per capita U.S. mineral utilization in 2015 was approximately 39,660 pounds – [file:///C:/Users/Chris/Downloads/2016-Mineral-baby-image%20\(1\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/Chris/Downloads/2016-Mineral-baby-image%20(1).pdf), times 321,700,000 people, equals 6,380,000,000 tons of NNRs. U.S. inflation adjusted GDP estimates and U.S. population estimates for years 1800 and 2015 from Measuring Worth – <http://www.measuringworth.com/>.
11. Two of the more prominent purveyors of the “sustainability” myth: On September 25, 2015, the United Nations formally adopted its “17 Sustainable Development Goals.” According to the UN, between 2016 and 2030, “countries will mobilize efforts to end all forms of poverty, fight inequalities, and tackle climate change, while ensuring that no one is left behind.” – <http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/> McKinsey & Company, Nyquist, S., and Rogers, M., 11-4-16, in the first sentence of the Executive Summary to “Sustainability & Resource Productivity,” state

that “Sustainable growth, in both economic and environmental terms, is a global priority.” – <http://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/sustainability-and-resource-productivity/our-insights/mckinsey-on-sustainability-and-resource-productivity/mckinsey-on-sustainability-and-resource-productivity-number-4>

12. For an overview of humanity’s “predicament,” see William Catton, “*Overshoot*,” pg. 5, University of Illinois Press, Urbana, IL, 1982. In part, “Human population, organized into industrial societies and blind to the temporariness of carrying capacity supplements based on exhaustible resource dependence, responded by increasing more exuberantly than ever, even though this meant overshooting the number our planet could permanently support. Something akin to bankruptcy was the inevitable sequel.”

13. Catton, William, “*Overshoot*,” pg. 96. “...organisms using their habitat unavoidably reduce its capacity to support their kind by what they necessarily do to it in the process of living.”

14. Youngquist, Walter, “*Geodesinies*,” pg. 158, National Book Company, Portland, OR, 1997. “In nature, the over-extension of a population upon a resource which diminishes is well known, and the results tend to be disastrous.”

15. For details regarding the episode of epidemic global NNR scarcity that occurred during the first decade of the twenty-first century, see Clugston, Christopher,

“*Scarcity – Humanity’s Final Chapter?*” pgs. 51-74, Booklocker.com, 2012 – www.nnrscarcity.com.

16. “Annual percentage growth rate of GDP and per capita GDP at market prices based on constant local currency,” *World Development Indicators*, World Bank, retrieved 7-3-16 – http://www.google.com/publicdata/explore?ds=d5bncppjof8f9_&met_y=ny_gdp_mktk_d_zg&hl=en&dl=en#!ctype=l&strail=false&bcs=d&nselm=h&met_y=ny_gdp_mktk_d_zg&scale_y=lin&ind_y=false&rdim=region&ifdim=region&tldim=true&hl=en_US&dl=en&ind=false.

17. “Fragile States Index,” Fund for Peace, 2016; 126 of the 178 analyzed nations (71 percent) received an “alert” or “warning” status – <http://fsi.fundforpeace.org/>. Time series map depicting the dramatically increasing incidence of global protests (social unrest) between 1979 and 2013, John Beielor – http://johnbeielor.org/protest_mapping/ (from www.johnbeielor.org), using Google’s GDELT dataset – <http://gdeltproject.org/>. “Social Unrest Index,” International Labor Organization, 7-8-13. “... since the global crisis [Great Recession], social unrest had increased in a majority of economies.” – http://www.ilo.org/newyork/voices-at-work/WCMS_217280/lang--en/index.htm; and “World Employment Social Outlook – Trends 2016,” page 22, International Labour Office, Geneva, 2016 – http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms_443480.pdf.

A Philosophical ‘Heretic’ on ‘Conserving Nature’

Environmentalism has all the hallmarks of a left-wing cause: a class of victims (future generations), an enlightened vanguard who fights for them (the eco-warriors), powerful philistines who exploit them (the capitalists), and endless opportunities to express resentment against the successful, the Wealthy, and the West. The style too is leftist: the environmentalist is young, disheveled, socially disreputable, his mind focused on higher things; the opponent is dull, middle-aged, smartly dressed, and usually American. The cause is designed to recruit the intellectuals, with facts and theories carelessly bandied about, and activism encouraged. Environmentalism is something you *join*, and for many young people it has the quasi-redemptive and identity-bestowing character of the twentieth-century revolutions....

However, the cause of the environment is not, in itself, a left-wing cause at all. It is not about ‘liberating’ or empowering the victim, but about safeguarding resources. It is not about ‘progress’ or ‘equality’ but about conservation and equilibrium.... Indeed, environmentalism is the quintessential *conservative* cause, the most vivid instance in the world as we know it, of that partnership between the dead, the living, and the unborn, which Burke defended as the conservative archetype. Its fundamental aim is not to bring about some radical reordering of society, or the abolition of inherited rights and privileges. It is not, in itself, interested in equality, except between generations, and its attitude to private property is, or ought to be, positive — for it is only private ownership that confers *responsibility* for the environment as opposed to the unqualified right to exploit it, a right whose effect we saw in the ruined landscapes and poisoned waterways of the former Soviet empire. ■

—Roger Scruton

Confessions of a Heretic: Selected Essays
(Notting Hill Editions Ltd, 2016, pp. 151-153)