

# Plastic and styrofoam ban essay



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## Environmentalism and Economic Freedom: The Case for Private Property

Rights I. Introduction This paper shall attempt to reconcile environmentalism and economic freedom. Before making this seemingly quixotic endeavor, we must be sure we are clear on both concepts. Environmentalism may be non-controversially defined as a philosophy which sees great benefit in clean air and water, and to a lowered rate of species extinction.

Environmentalists are particularly concerned with the survival and enhancement of endangered species such as trees, elephants, rhinos and whales, and air noise and dust pollution, oil spills, greenhouse effects and the dissipation of the ozone layer. Note, this version of environmentalism is a very moderate one. Moreover, it is purely goal directed. It implies no means to these ends whatsoever. In this perspective, environmentalism is, in principle, as much compatible with free enterprise as it is with its polar opposite, centralized governmental command and control.

Economic freedom also admits of a straightforward definition. It is the idea that people legitimately own themselves and the property they “capture” from nature by homesteading,<sup>2</sup> as well as the additional property they attain, further, by trading either their labor or their legitimately owned possessions.<sup>3</sup> Sometimes called libertarianism, in this view the only improper human activity is the initiation of threat or force against another or his property. This, too, is the only legitimate reason for law.

To prevent murder, theft, rape, trespass, fraud, arson, etc., and all other such invasions is the only proper function of legal enactments. At first glance the relationship between environmentalism and freedom would appear direct

Walter Block and straightforward: an increase in the one leads to a decrease in the other, and vice versa. And, indeed, there is strong evidence for an inverse relationship between the two. For example, there is the Marxist and even communist background of some advocates of the ecological movement with an axe to grind.

Their real interest is with power: running the lives of others, whether for their own good, for the good of society, or for the good of the unstoppable “ forces of history. ” They were doing pretty well on this score for decades in Russia and Eastern Europe. Thanks to them, this vast part of the globe was marching in lock step toward the Marxist vision of all power to the proletarians. ” But then, in 1989, thanks to the inner contradictions of communism (Mimes, 1969), their world turned topsy turvy. Some shifted their allegiances to the only fully communist systems remaining: Cuba, North Korea.

As for the others, nothing daunted, they just switched horses on the same old wagon: instead of formal socialism, these people adopted environmentalism as a better means toward their unchanged ends. They can best be characterized as “ watermelons,” in that while they are green on the outside they are still red on the inside. Then, there are the real greens. They see environmentalism not as a means toward an end, but as the very goal itself. The most radical of them are very forthright. They see man as the enemy of nature, and would, if they could, destroy the former to save the latter.

States Grabber (1989, p. 9), who is a U. S. National Park Service research biologist: “ Until such time as Homo sapiens should decide to rejoin nature, some of us can only hope for the right virus to Journal of Business Ethics 17: 1887-1899, 1998. 1998 Keller Academic Publishers. Printed in the Netherlands. 1888 come along. ” In the view of Foreman (1990, p. 48), who is co-founder of Earth First! 5 and former lobbyist for the Wilderness Society, “ We re a cancer on nature. ” And here is how Mills (1989, p. 106) describes the other members of her own species: “ Debased human protoplasm. 6 Some are only slightly less radical. They do Instead, they merely hold that animals have rights, that trees have rights, that microscopic organisms have rights. It is reputed that Ghanaian, for instance, sometimes went around wearing a surgical mask, so that he would not inadvertently kill a micro organism by inhaling it. If so, that practice would certainly be in keeping with this philosophy. Stepping down a peg in the extremism of the ecologically concerned, there are those who rely blame markets, free enterprise, capitalism, for the ruination of the planet.

In their view, what is needed is to curb these vicious appetites, and to return to a “ kinder, gentler” version of governmental interventionism. For example, with regard to contaminated New York City beaches, the Commissioner of Health from the Big Apple stated on Canadian Public Television (30 July 1988): I think the motivation is greed, you know, uncaring about the planet, non-caring about the ocean, and not caring about the people who live on the planet and want to use the ocean – greed.

In the view of environmentalist Ornate Croaks guarding pulp mill operators (CATV Report, 15 March 1989): They would rather rape the environment and <https://assignbuster.com/plastic-and-styrofoam-ban-essay/>

make a lot of money for themselves than not rape the environment, clean up, and later on ... Stay competitive. The mills are here to make a lot of profit, and they're making a lot of profit at the cost of our environment. 7 And states Commoner, 8 The origin of the environmental crisis can be traced back to the capitalist precept that the choice of production technology is to be governed solely by private interest in profit minimization.

Other statements of this ilk include Priori and Winner (1988, p. 11): " The danger lies not in the odd maverick polluting factory, industry or technology, but in ... Industrialism itself"; Booking (1970, p. 14): " The plundering of the human spirit by the marketplace is paralleled by markets " take the sacredness out of life, because there can be nothing sacred in something that has a price" (Schumacher, 1973, p. 45). 9 Then there are those who oppose not only market competition in general, but also want to ban particular products made possible by this system.

For instance, there are calls to prohibit 747 airplanes (Riffing, 1980, p. 216), automobiles (Sale, 1989, p. 33), eyeglasses (Mills, 1989, p. 06), private washing machines (Booking, 1989, p. 22), tailored clothing (Schumacher, 1973, pp. 57-58), toilet paper (Mills, 1989, pp. 167-168). Paradoxically, there is a very limited but possible sense in which it is rational to prefer the reds to the greens. True, the former, not the latter, killed millions upon millions of people (Conquest, 1986, 1990). But at least their goal, their purpose, their aim, their end, was to help human beings.

Yes, they picked a tragically erroneous way of going about this, a philosophy from which the entire world's peoples are still reeling. However, it must be

conceded, they were not orators to their species. 10 This, unfortunately, cannot be said of some of the greens, particularly the more radical ones. Nor can it be denied, that at least so far, with the exception of a few unfortunate loggers, the greens have not killed nor hurt very many people. But if their own publicly articulated intentions are to be believed, given the power they might be a greater danger to the human race than even the communists. 11 This, in short, is the case for believing there to be an inverse relationship between environmentalism and freedom. However, it is not a direct and straightforward one: an increase in the en does not always lead to a decrease in the other, and vice versa. What are the exceptions? How can environmentalism and economic freedom be reconciled? 12 Simple. By showing that free enterprise is the best meaner toward the end of environmental protection. This appears a daunting task Environmentalism and Economic Freedom at the outset, given the emphasis placed by most environmentalists on socialism, and their hatred for capitalism.

But a hint of the solution may be garnered by the fact that laissez-fairer capitalism, as adumbrated above, strenuously opposes invasions, or border crossings, and that interpreted in just such a manner. The reason for environmental damage, then, is the failure of government to protect property rights (omissions) and other state activity which either regulates private property, or which forbids it outright (commissions). Let us consider a few test cases. II. Air pollution According to the mainstream economic analysis, libertarianism is wrong.

The problem of airborne pollutants is not due to a failure of government to protect private property rights. Instead, this comes about because of “

market failure,” a basic flaw in free enterprise. Piggy (1912, p. 159) gives the classic statement of this view: Smoke in large towns which inflicts a heavy loss on the community ... Comes about because there is no way to force private polluters to bear the social cost of their operations. Samuelsson (1956, 1970) conveys the same sentiment in terms of the divergence between private and social costs. Lange and Taylor (1938, p. 03) are yet additional socialists who make a complementary point: A feature which distinguishes a socialist economy from one based on private enterprise is the comprehensiveness of the items entering into the socialist price system. In other words, for some strange dark mysterious reason, capitalists, under laissez faire, are excused from even considering the physical harm they do to the property of others through the emissions of their smoke particles. Under socialism, in contrast, the central planner of course takes this into account, nipping the problem of pollution in the bud. 889 There is so much wrong with this scenario it is hard to know where to begin a refutation. Perhaps we may best start with an empirical observation. If this criticism of the market were couldn't successfully run an economy, they could at least be trusted as far as the environment is concerned. In actual point of fact, nothing could be further from the truth. Exhibit “ A” is perhaps the disappearance of the Oral and Caspian Seas, due to massive and unchecked pollution, over cutting of trees, and consequent desertification. Then there is Coherency, which caused hundreds, if not thousands of deaths. 3 For ferry boats in the Volta River, it is forbidden to smoke cigarettes. This is not for intrusive paternalistic health reasons as in the west, but because this river is so polluted with oil and other flammable materials that there is a great fear that if a cigarette is tossed overboard, it will set the entire body of water on fire.

Further, under Communism, there was little or no waste treatment of sewage in Poland, the gold roof in Craw's Sigmund Chapel dissolved due to acid rain, there was a dark brown haze over much of East Germany, and the sulfur dioxide concentrations in Czechoslovakia were eight times levels common in the U.

S. (Dillinger, 1990). Nor was it a matter merely of the absence of democracy in the U. S. S. R. The ecological record of the U. S. Government, where democracy is the order of the day, is none too savory. The Department of Defense has dumped 400, 000 tons of hazardous waste, more than the five largest chemical corporations combined. The Rocky Mountain Arsenal carelessly disposed of river gas, mustard shells, the anti crop spray TX, and incendiary devices.

And this is to say nothing of the infamous Yellowstone Park forest fire, which the authorities refused to put out, citing ecological considerations; 14 nor the TV's 59 coal fired power plants; nor the underpinning and overuse of land administered by the Bureau of Land Management; nor that fact that the government subsidizes forest over cutting by building logging roads. These are not examples of market failure. Rather, they are instances of government failure: 1890 direct controls and inability or unwillingness to uphold private property rights.

But what of Piggy and Samuelsson charge of the misapplication effect of negative externalities, or external discomposes? This, too, is erroneous. Up to the sass and sass, the legal Jurisprudence in Great Britain and the U. S. Was more or less predicated upon the libertarian vision of non invasiveness



(Cease, 1960, Hurwitz, 1977). Typically, a farmer would complain that a railroad engine had emitted sparks which set ablaze his haystacks or other crops. Or a woman would accuse a factory of sending airborne pollutants to her property, which would dirty her clean laundry hanging on a clothesline.

Or someone could object to the foreign matter imposed in one's lungs without permission. Almost invariably, the courts would take cognizance of this violation of plaintiff's rights. 15 The usual result during this epoch was injunctive relief, plus an award of damages. Contrary to Piggy and Samuelsson, manufacturers, foundries, railroads, etc. , could not act in a vacuum, as if the costs they imposed on others were of no moment. There was a " way to force private polluters to bear the social cost of their operations": sue them, make them pay for their past transgressions, and get a court order prohibiting them from such invasions in true.

Upholding property rights in this manner had several salutary effects. First of all, there was an incentive to use clean burning, but slightly more expensive anthracite coal rather than the cheaper but dirtier high sulfur content variety; less risk of lawsuits. Second, it paid to install scrubbers, and other techniques for reducing pollution output. Third there was an impetus to engage in research and development of new and better methods for the internalization of externalities: keeping one's pollutants to oneself.

Fourth, there was a movement toward the use better chimneys and other smoke prevention devices. Fifth, an incipient forensic pollution industry was in the process of being developed. 16 Sixth, the location decisions of manufacturing firms was intimately profitable to establish a plant in an area

with very few people, or none at all; setting up shop in a residential area, for example, would subject the firm to debilitating lawsuits. 17 But then in the sass and sass a new legal philosophy took hold. No longer were private property rights upheld.

Now, there was an even more important consideration: the public good. And of what did the public good consist in this new dispensation? The growth and progress of the U. S. Economy. Toward this end it was decided that the Jurisprudence of the sass and sass was a needless indulgence. Accordingly, when an environmental plaintiff came to court under this new system, he was given short shrift. He was told, in effect, that of course his private property rights were being violated; but that this was entirely proper, since there is something even more important than selfish, individualistic property rights.

And this was the “ public good” of encouraging manufacturing. 18 Under this legal convention, all the economic incentives of the previous regime were turned around 180 degrees. Why use clean burning, but slightly more expensive anthracite coal rather than the cheaper but dirtier high sulfur content variety? Why install scrubbers, and other techniques for reducing pollution output, or engage in environmental research and development, or use better chimneys and other smoke prevention devices, or make location decisions so as to negatively impact as few people as possible?

Needless to say, the incipient forensic pollution industry was rendered stillborn. And what of the “ green” manufacturer, who didn’t want to foul the planet’s atmosphere, or the libertarian, who refused to do this on the rounds

that is was an unjustified invasion of other people's property? There is a name for such people, and it is called "bankrupt." 19 For to engage in environmentally sound business practices under a legal regime which no longer requires this is to impose on oneself a competitive disadvantage. Other things equal, this will guarantee bankruptcy.

From roughly 1850 to 1970, firms were able no way to force private polluters to bear the social cost of their operations" a la Piggy; this is why there was a Samuelsson "divergence of social and private costs." This was no failure of the market. It was a failure of the government to uphold free enterprise with a legal system protective of private property rights. In the sass a "discovery" was made: the air quality was dangerous to human beings and other living creatures. Having caused the problem itself, the government now set out to cure it, with a whole host of regulations which only made things worse.

There were demands for electric cars, for minimal mileage per gallon for gasoline, for subsidies to wind, water, solar and nuclear power, for taxes on coal, oil, gas and other such fuels, for arbitrary cutbacks in the amount of pollutants into the air. The nation wide 55 mile per hour speed limit was not initially motivated by safety considerations, but rather by ecological ones. "Rent seeking" played a role in the scramble, as eastern (dirty burning sulfur) coal interests prevailed over their western (clean burning anthracite) counterparts.

The former wanted compulsory scrubbers, the latter wanted the mandated substitution of their own coal for that of their competitors. And what was the view of the supposedly free market oriented Chicago School? Instead of

harking back to a system of private property rights, they urged the “ more efficient” assist isolations. Instead of a command and control system, they urged the adoption of traceable emissions rights (Terse). In this system (Hahn, 1989, Hahn and Staving, 1990, Hahn and Hester, 1989), instead of forcing each and every polluter to cut back by, say, one third, they would demand of all of them together that this goal be attained.

Why is this beneficial? It might be difficult and expensive for some firms to reduce pollution from 150 to 100 tons, and easy and cheap for others. Under Terse, some could reduce the pollution levels by less than 1/3 (or even increase reduce theirs by more than this amount. The meaner through which this would be accomplished would be a system of “ rights to pollute,” and an organized market through which these could be bought and sold. The implications of this scheme for freedom are clear.

States Anderson (1990): Fortunately, there is a simple, effective approach 1891 available – long appreciated but under used. An approach based solidly on ... Private property rights. At its root all pollution is garbage disposal in one form or another. The essence of the problem is that our laws and the administration of Justice have not kept up with the refuse produced by the exploding Roth of industry, technology and science. If you took a bag of garbage and dropped it on your neighbor’s lawn, we all know what would happen.

Your neighbor would call the police and you would soon find out that the disposal of your garbage is your responsibility, and that it must be done in a way that does not violate anyone else’s property rights. But if you took that

same bag of garbage and burned it in a backyard incinerator, letting the sotto ash drift over the neighborhood, the problem gets more complicated. The violation of property rights is clear, but protecting them is more difficult. And when the garbage is invisible to the naked eye, as much air and water pollution is, the problem often seems insurmountable.

We have tried many remedies in the past. We have tried to dissuade polluters with fines, with government programs whereby all pay to clean up the garbage produced by the few, with a myriad of detailed regulations to control the degree of pollution. Now some even seriously propose that we should have economic incentives, to charge polluters a fee for polluting – and the more they pollute the more they pay. But that is just like taxing burglars as an economic incentive to deter people from stealing your property, and just as unconscionable.