

Rescuing Environmentalism

What do you think about the world's efforts to become better stewards of our natural resources through market-based solutions?

Inevitably, over the years, greenhouse emissions have taken a toll on the world as we know it. It seems as though such environmental hazards and concerns are traveling through a bottomless pit; they are never ending. The picture, as a whole, is so broad and dense that political powers and money hungry big business advocates are taking their stance in dramatic ways. Although many “greens” are not as apt to accept “market-based” solutions to such a priceless resource as our environment, there must be some sort of action taken. “If environmental groups continue to reject pragmatic solutions and instead drift toward Utopian (or dystopian) visions of the future, they will lose the battle of ideas.” (Rescuing environmentalism) Although implemented actions such as the Kyoto protocol and the Precautionary Principle seem to be a mean to no end, what condition would our environment be in if no small or large action was taken at all?

I will be the first to admit that any skeptic American never sees each little effort as a remedy, but only as a quick fix to a never ending solution—I am usually the biggest cynic myself. However, I will also be the first to admit that if no action is taken, I wouldn't want to see the world as it would inevitably become; the long run effects will be detrimental not only to our natural resources, but to society as a whole.

Of course, whenever we discuss any subject pertaining to environmental issues, cost-benefit is always prevalent throughout the pros and cons of each action. Whenever politics are involved, in my opinion, everything from their first born to the color of their tie is discussed amongst a cost-benefit analysis. When “market-based solutions” such as the Kyoto protocol and the Precautionary Principle are weighed out on a cost-benefit chart, the main concerns are money, time and political approval. Putting forth such efforts—just as anything else in this country—requires money, time and approval. What if the world absolutely put environmental issues on a back burner due to the fact that we are inept at sourcing funds and time for such an important aspect of life? The long term costs of doing nothing outweigh the

short term monetary costs immensely when dealing with an irreplaceable, non-renewable environment and natural resources.

Looking at the issue from the opposing side, it is very true what the article points out—“The marginal cost of removing the last 5% of a given pollutant is often far higher than removing the first 5% or even 50%...”(Rescuing Environmentalism). The government is ruled by economic policies and marginal cost/benefit analysis throughout policy making. This makes absolute complete sense; citizens only want the best for the country, and don't want the government wasting valuable time and dollars on something barely responding or improving. However, when deciding on issues concerning something as subjective and irreplaceable as the environment, no shortcomings or marginal costs should hinder an ultimate decision of whether or not we are benefiting from such environmental concerned practices.

A hundred years ago, it would have been mind blowing to know that pollution rights have turned into a common property good that can be traded, bought and sold. What's next, our children acting as merchandise? Although the Kyoto Protocol embraces beneficial limitations on emissions, it also contradicts its overall goal—to hinder pollution altogether—by selling the rights to pollute. This makes absolutely no sense to me; it's almost as though the strong are getting stronger and the weak are getting weaker. Every gorilla country that signs the Protocol will have won the approval of the public eye as the “do-gooders” for protecting the environment, but beneath it all, they are still doing just as much damage—now, the only difference is that they have to literally pay for it (or trade it, or put it on eBay...).

So, are we really embracing and nurturing the prosperity of our natural resources through these market-based solutions? The truth, we will never know—this is politics; as far as I'm concerned, a “half way” solution is better than no solution at all and will eventually become a mean to an end.