The Free Nature Movement

Contributed by Chuck Burr
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Why the environmental movement has failed to protect the environment. Introducing the “Free Nature Movement” and why like abolition and suffrage it can succeed in freeing nature from humanity.

Environmentalism is not a movement.
For a political campaign to be considered a movement, it has to drive a new right into the Constitution. Recycling and carpooling is not amending the Constitution.
The environmental movement cannot, as it is currently structured, protect the other species from our burgeoning population.

Nothing is effectively achieved until the Constitution is amended. A 28th Amendment that gives all other species equal rights to humanity would enable legislation to begin to reverse the 233 years of exploitation that the U.S. is founded upon.

This is not as far fetched as it sounds. In 2002 the lower house of parliament in Germany, the Bundestag, adopted a bill that for the first time enshrined animal rights in the constitution. The bill passed by a huge majority, and said “The state takes responsibility for protecting the natural foundations of life and animals in the interest of future generations.” This makes Germany the first country, as far as I know, to give constitutional rights to animals. This is as good a place as any to say where the Free Nature Movement began.

On a local level, your town council or county commissioners can adopt the “The Rights of Nature Ordinance.” First passed in 2006 by the Tamaqua Borough Council in Schuylkill County, Pennsylvania, the ordinance states that, “People and their communities are trustees of nature, and communities of nature and ecosystems form part of the natural trust.”

What is a “right”?

A right is more than the right to vote. A true right is to allow all other species to follow their own destiny as given by the universe and by god.

Today we have enslaved nature to do our bidding. The Bible refers to man’s dominion “over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.”

As many know, this enslavement actually began with agricultural revolution 10,000 years ago when one tribe started living a new story, that “the world belongs to man.” This was the birth of our modern taker culture [as in takers versus leavers]. One tribe in the fertile crescent between the Euphrates and Tigris rivers cast away the story that enabled humanity to live in symbiosis with the earth’s ecosystem for three million years, that says “humanity belongs to the earth.”

Equal rights also includes equal consideration and representation. Most indigenous tribes have rituals to testify that the human family is one strand in the larger web of life, to acknowledge all our relations. For instance, the Hopi of the Southwest United States have celebrated a Council of All Beings ritual with masks representing plants and animals for thousands of years.

“Freedom” is a lie

Freedom is probably the greatest lie created by the Agricultural Revolution and is the foundation of our modern culture. Since we are born our culture tells us that we want to be free from want; it’s a double negative. And the way to obtain freedom is to work hard to be able to buy or consume the things that will make us free, including food, shelter, and clothing. Our culture’s idea of freedom is a lifetime of enslavement to pay for mortgage for a roof over our heads.

True freedom, like a true right, is the ability to follow your own destiny. Being locked in a consumer culture making things to get things is not freedom.

The concept of freedom has also been used as an excuse to perpetuate our culture in the form of continued exploitation of man and beast. Because those at the top “are free” they can do as they please. The wealthy are free to consume in a global economy where a minority exploits the majority.

We also use freedom to justify our unlimited procreation. As far back as the Old Testament, Adam chooses Eve. Eve literally translates to “life.” Adam has chosen to forgo the limits of nature, to take more than humanity's fair share from all other species, and to produce a surplus of food to grow a larger population. We can do this because, “we are free—humanity is free of limits.”

Earth Culture will enable the Free Nature Movement

When enough people figure out that modern culture cannot take care of them or their descendants, a tipping point to the creation of new cultures will have arrived. Today a new earth culture(s) is beginning to grow out of our decaying modern taker culture. Our current financial crisis probably will begin this awakening or remembering.

We are beginning to remember what it took for an average person to make a living in harmony with the web of life. It boils down to giving support to get support instead of making things to get things.

Once we can turn that corner and make that mental shift that we are just one strand of the web of life and that we need the entire web for not only our sake, but for the sake of our relations, then we will let go of our false freedom. For

instance, we will also be at the point we are able to let go of private property and growth-without-limits. When this shift in values happens, we will give ourselves the alternatives we need to live new lifestyles.

By letting go of our “freedom” to do as we will, we “free” nature from her bondage and exploitation.

Transition to a new culture

So how are we going to get there? A big part of the answer to that question is in this graphic of Saudi oil depletion. We are good through 2010, then it is down to nothing in a relatively short period of time. Just look at the chart.

Think about this: world population in 1850 before the use of oil was about 1 billion, and that was before we entered overshoot and significantly drew down natural resources. In 1850 North Americans had nearly an intact new continent and ecosystem, today we have “peak everything” and a biodiversity crash with 6.8 billion humans. This means there are about 5.8 billion people, in my opinion, here mostly because of oil. An eight-wheel farm tractor with a GPS does no good without diesel; you’re back to the draft horse. And don’t tell me you are going to mine, mill, smelt, and fabricate a steel tractor with a solar collector. Sure we will have coal for another 30 or 40 years, but most of that will go to lights and toasters.

The transition to the steady-state we are heading for will take in my estimation, another 100 years to finally plateau. How rough it will be remains to be seen. But, judging by how hard the dominant paradigm is hanging on, it will be rough. My biggest question is how much biodiversity, the ecosystem’s resilience, will be left by 2100?

What will the new lifestyle look like?

You have to accept that we are not going to be here to see it. We will see the transition from the age of exuberance to the age of powering down; that is happening now. The age of powering down will be one of learning lost skills, building community, figuring out how to do with less, and leaving behind much of the stuff we can’t use any more. If you take the seats out, your SUV may make a nice playhouse for the grandkids.

In this phase, humanity may begin to loosen its grip over nature. The diminishing human population will start to leave more room for the other species. Our mindset will have not changed yet, the world will “still belong to man,” but nature will get some breathing room. I just hope there is enough of her left to regenerate. Humanity is pushing every species except cows to the edge of extinction.

If enough of nature is left after 2100 years, that is when the restoration time begins. Hopefully what is left of modern

culture will be so shell-shocked in 100 years by what they have lost that our descendants will just walk away from that failed lifestyle and live closer to the earth. They will have to.

It is easy to describe a future souped-up 1850s lifestyle maybe with radios, but it is the ethics and story that we live by that will make all the difference. For the last 110 years our ethics have been blinded by an addiction to a cheap energy surplus that created all this stuff, technology, and the middle class. Without cheap energy, it will all go away. Lets hope there are people starting to think about building knowledge arks now.

The point is that it is the story we live by that can free nature. If we can remember the original story that worked for humanity for three million years, that “humanity belongs to the earth,” then we will be able to let go of our selves, our grasping, and our freedom in order to free nature.

In the end, I believe that the Free Nature Movement will just happen because the dominant culture will just go away. There will be very little modern taker culture left to have to convince to allow nature to follow her destiny. It will just happen.

Read Culturequake: The End of Modern Culture and the Rise of Earth Culture. Visit www.culturequake.org to learn more about Culturequake the book and the online magazine. ©2009 Chuck Burr LLC

Notes:

BBC News: Germany to grant animal rights:

news.bbc.co.uk

CELDF: Rights of Nature Ordinance:

celdf.org

EarthLight: The Ecological Self:

earthlight.org

Culture Change: Counter Argument for "Stimulus," Growth and Employment:

culturechange.org

The Honoring All Life Foundation: Exploring Choices Honoring the Essence of All:

honoringalllife.org

Culturequake: Usufruct: End Private Property to Solve the Financial Crisis and Create Food Security:

culturequake.org

The Oil Drum: Saudi Arabia's Crude Oil Production Peaked in 2005:

theoildrum.com

Wikipedia: World population:

en.wikipedia.org

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Editor’s note: The author asks, “What will the new lifestyle look like? You have to accept that we are not going to be here to see it.” I believe we will see it. And we had damned well better. We will be lucky to see it, at the rate we are seeing our Earth home trashed and spinning out of balance. It is optimistic to assume we will see coal used along with toasters for decades to come, although I personally would like to see a culture change that gives up the alleged need for the coal on a massive scale. – JL

Graphics above courtesy Chuck Burr's website.