

Sustainability

Lecture Part 4

SOC165

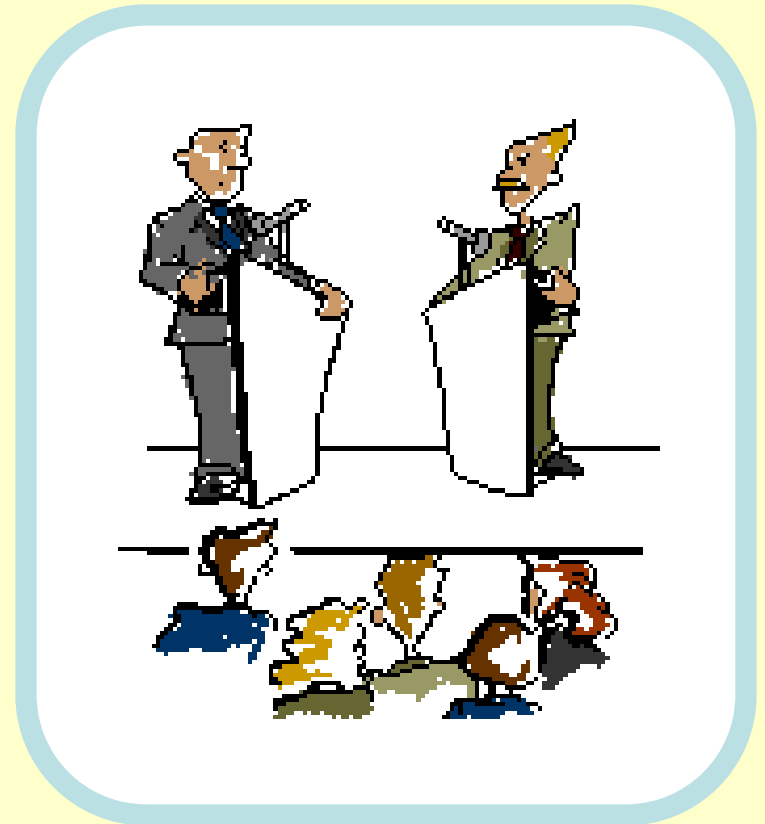
Spring 2010



In Part 4

Sustainability in debate:

- Some critiques of the sustainability concept



Is Sustainability Possible?

- Intergenerational responsibility
- Can we guess the needs of future generations?
 - Example: Maybe in the future, cars will run on water or sand – in which case, conservation of oil is not necessary

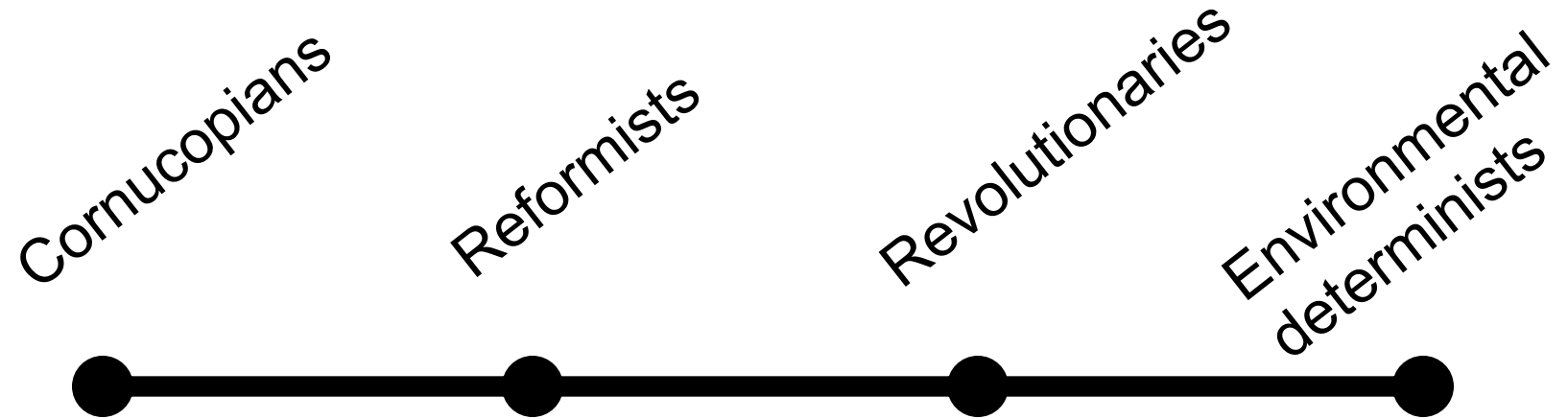


Critique of “Sustainability”

- Vague concept
- Wide range of opinions
- Cornucopians: it's not necessary to restrict growth
- Others say growth is inherently unsustainable



Perspectives on Sustainability



Debates About Sustainability

- Cornucopians: “Sustainability” is nothing to worry about
- Reformists: Work within existing structures to make society more “green”
- Revolutionaries: Sustainability is not possible without radical change
- Environmental determinists: Ecological limits will impose changes on society whether we like it or not



Thomas Malthus
1766-1834



Cornucopians?

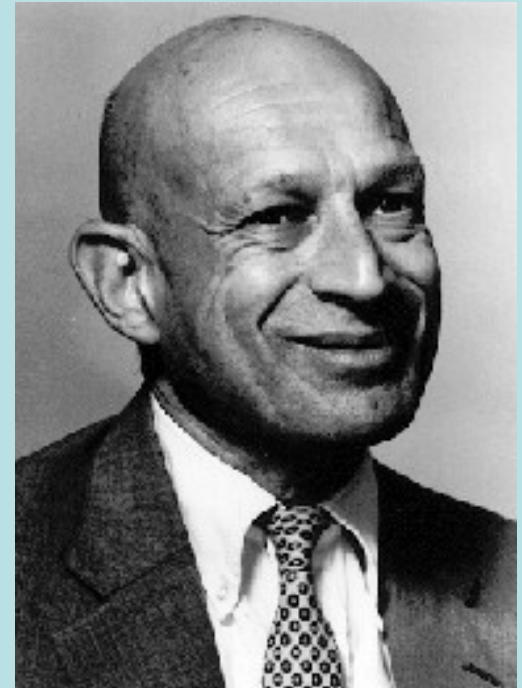


Cornucopia



Cornucopians

- There are plenty of natural resources
- Prices for many basic industrial inputs have declined
- Human intelligence is the “ultimate resource”
- More people is good
- We can create new technologies



Julian Simon
1932-1998



Sustainable Growth Impossible?

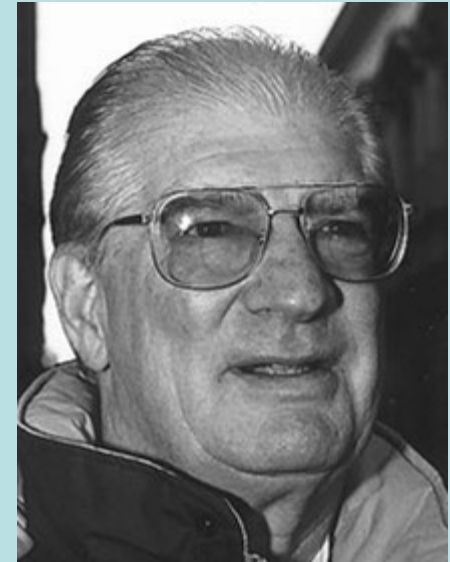
Limits to growth

- For physical reasons, there is a limit to the amount of resources on earth and the number of people that can live on earth.
- Thus, economic growth cannot be infinite.
- The current economic system is based on the assumption that growth is desirable and infinite.
- Thus, the present economic system is unsustainable.



Daly: Sustainable Development vs. “Sustainable Growth”

- Sustainable development = economic improvement without growth
- Growth vs. development: “When something grows it gets bigger. When something develops it gets different.”



Herman Daly



Daly and Development

- Sustainable development should start with the wealthy industrialized countries
- The wealthy can better afford new technologies and practices, such as:
 - Tax resource extraction
 - Reduce the income tax
 - Tax pollution
- Sustainable economy: Stops increasing raw natural resource inputs, and at some point stops at a scale at which the environment can continue to function and renew itself naturally. This “non-growing” economy is always changing and adapting – not stagnant.



Sustainability – Different Views

- Simon: no need for “sustainability”
- Daly: Sustainability necessary, requires economic reform
- ToP: radical reform necessary
- Determinists have little hope society can make the necessary changes



Sustainability Views

“Can we keep doing what we’re doing?”

- Simon: Yes!
- Daly: No, we need to scale back
- ToP: No, we need to get off the “treadmill”
- Determinists: We will keep doing what we’re doing until we can’t any more



Summary

In this lecture we discussed ...

- What is sustainability?
- Social and ecological dimensions of sustainability
- Debates about possibility of sustainable society and example of GMO's

In the next lecture, we...

- Discuss environment and human health
- Environmental justice
- Social and personal risks from environmental problems



Citations Used in This Lecture

Daly, H. (1990) “Sustainable Growth: An Impossibility Theorem.” *Development* 3(4):45-48.

Simon, J., and Buckley, Jr., W. F. (1982) “Answer to Malthus? Julian Simon Interviewed by William Buckley.” *Population and Development Review* 8(1):205-218.