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## Mark Landsbaum: Man should be free to love the Earth

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I'm an environmentalist. I love trees, having squeezed nearly two-dozen evergreens and deciduous onto our normal-size, suburban tract-house lot. My bride and I are rarely happier than when digging in dirt to plant another truckload of flowers and shrubs.

Camphors and clinging rose vines are among God's most glorious creations. I flinch at the site of strip-mined hillsides, and can't get enough of wild, yellow mustard flowers that carpet Southern California's rolling hills after spring rains.

Here's where I differ from radical environmentalists. A barren, brown, lifeless expanse of arid terrain isn't, in my view, its best use. Flying in to any Southern California airport is a stark reminder of the good man has done. From above, long swaths of green are wonderfully obvious, formed by countless lush trees shoulder to shoulder, and ever-so-many more shrubs carpeting this once unfruitful plain. Those trees and shrubs were planted by people.

To look on what man has wrought is a persuasive argument that this environment is improved immensely, bringing green to what was brown, flowers to what was sterile and beauty to what was bleak. From ground level, look in any direction, and see the fruits of man's labor – trees that otherwise wouldn't be there, colors that otherwise would be absent and an abundance of birds, butterflies and other creatures sustained and nourished by our manmade garden. We have made a literal oasis. People did it.

Then there's this: People have a right to do with their property what they will, so long as it doesn't damage or injure others. Property rights are one of the unalienable rights our founders protected when they set this nation in motion. They recognized these as God-given rights that man can't legitimately revoke.

But where does one's fist stop and another's nose begin? Anyone paying attention the past 40 years had to notice that peoples' fists have been allowed to extend less and less while the environment's nose apparently has grown like Pinocchio's. We've gone too far in protecting the environment from people – in many cases, even from the people who own it.

Radical environmentalists have adopted a religious fervor. They elevate the animal and vegetable above the human. They tip the scales not only to the detriment of peoples' property rights, but to the detriment of people, period.

The over-reaching that denies water and livelihood to the Central California agriculture community ostensibly to benefit a tiny fish, the Delta smelt, is but one example. It's akin to the extremism that denies impoverished, developing countries inexpensive electrical power in order to "fight" a hyped and perhaps fraudulent threat of global warming. In these cases, radical environmentalists insist livelihoods must be sacrificed, indeed, life expectancies and quality of life must be sacrificed, on the altar of extremism.

This is not new. "I have precious little sympathy for the selfish propriety of civilized man, and if a war of races should occur between the wild beasts and Lord man, I would be tempted to sympathize with the bears," John Muir, father of the modern environmental movement, wrote a century ago.

As the Pacific Legal Foundation's M. David Stirling notes in his book, "Green Gone Wild," Muir came to believe orchids and critters were "superior beings" to man. "Muir was outspokenly hostile toward man's

perception that he rightfully dominated the Earth."

Everyone operates from some set of core beliefs, assumptions we make about reality, about what's right and wrong. Radical environmentalists believe man, at best, is no more worthy than flora or fauna. Therefore, man has no superior claim. If man alters the condition of flora and fauna, man has transgressed.

The alternate worldview begins with a different assumption, as did our nation's founders when they acknowledged men are endowed with God-given rights by their Creator. This view elevates men above flora and fauna. According to this assumption, man not only is superior to, but has a responsibility to be steward of the rest of creation: "[L]et them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."

Both views essentially are religious. "The openly religious beliefs of Muir and his followers, by contrast, are really a theology of fundamentalist pantheism," Stirling wrote. "In practice, fundamentalist pantheism seeks to exclude human beings from their own habitat, the property they rightfully own."

Observers such as the libertarian Cato Institute note that regulatory excesses to protect the environment from humans have gone "horribly off track." Draconian regulations such as the Endangered Species Act have had opposite their intended effects, and should be repealed. "If private parties are allowed to own and trade animals as commodities, commercial demand is a critical component of population protection," Cato suggests.

Viewing man as steward rather than molester changes everything. "Consider the example of irrigation water withdrawals reducing stream flows for fish habitat," writes Terry L. Anderson in PERC Reports, a publication for free-market environmentalism. "[T]rout fishers might argue that farmers are imposing costs on them and that the government should regulate water use. An environmental entrepreneur, however, sees an opportunity to convince trout lovers to contribute to the cause and to contract with farmers to increase in-stream flows."

Radical environmentalism resists such approaches. To save the African environment, for example, radical environmentalism imposed its dogmatic conservation, resulting in displaced and further impoverished Africans, as Robert H. Nelson writes in "The New Holy Wars, Economic Religion Vs. Environmental Religion."

All around us, evidence mounts of extreme environmentalism's counterproductive effects. Meanwhile, evidence is overwhelming that economic prosperity empowers cultures to clean their environment.

"It is no accident that wealthy countries have made the most progress toward sustainable development," write James M. Taylor and Joseph L. Bast of the Heartland Institute. "When people are forced to choose between food, clothing, shelter, medicine or a green environment, a green environment becomes a luxury item. The best way to ensure effective stewardship of the environment is to encourage the development of wealth that makes environmental stewardship possible." Radical environmentalism is directly at odds with encouraging "the development of wealth."

Unlike radical environmentalists, this writer loves trees, shrubs and butterflies, but not at the expense of human suffering and infringement of basic human rights. What we assume dictates where we end up. If man is considered subordinate to the rest of creation, it's inevitable that the rest of creation must be protected from him. If man is considered superior, however, it follows that he has "a divinely ordained responsibility to exercise faithful stewardship," in the words of the [Cornwall Alliance](#), a coalition of clergy, theologians, religious leaders, scientists, academics and policy experts.

Similarly, the [Acton Institute](#) concludes that "abundant, affordable energy is indispensable to human flourishing, particularly to societies which are rising out of abject poverty and the high rates of disease and premature death that accompany it. With present technologies, fossil and nuclear fuels are indispensable if energy is to be abundant and affordable."

That also conflicts with radical environmentalism's demand for mandatory reductions of greenhouse gas

emissions by reducing reliance on fossil fuels, that will "greatly increase the price of energy and harm economies," the Acton Institute points out. That's why Acton calls for policies that make energy more affordable to protect human liberty.

Instead, the environmental movement promotes "ambitious attempts to radically reorganize and change the world, human society, our behavior and our values," according to Vaclav Klaus, an economist and president of the Czech Republic. The movement has a "disbelief in the power of the invisible hand of the free market and a belief in the omnipotence of state dirigisme." The result is a radical risk-aversion oblivious to the real-life costs of its controls and restrictions.

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