

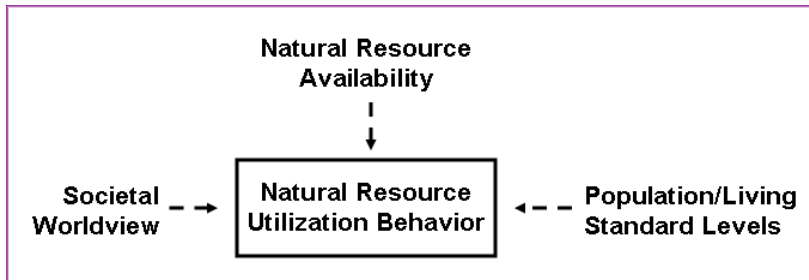
It is Time to Strike at the Root of our Predicament

Thoreau said “there are a thousand hacking at the branches of evil to one who is striking at the root”. Today’s social activists who are attempting to resolve problems such as “overpopulation”, “climate change” and “unsustainable economic growth” are hacking at the branches of our predicament; it is time to strike at the root—our unsustainable natural resource utilization behavior.

Natural Resource Utilization Behavior

The following factors determine a society’s natural resource utilization behavior, i.e., the mix and levels of natural resources utilized by the society:

Societal Natural Resource Utilization Behavior

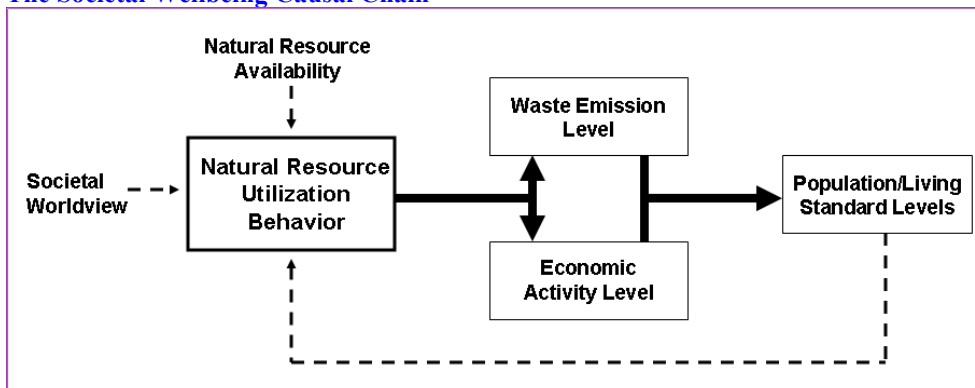


1. **Natural Resource Availability:** systemic factors including ecology (physical resource availability); economics (resource affordability); and politics (resource accessibility), influence the mix and levels of natural resources utilized by a society.
2. **Societal Worldview:** a society’s cultural orientation—its perception of the earth as a finite ecosphere containing limited natural resources, or as a veritable treasure trove containing unlimited natural resources—influences the mix and levels of natural resources utilized by the society.
3. **Societal Population Level and Material Living Standards:** the size of a society’s existing population and per capita consumption level influence the mix and levels of natural resources utilized by the society.

The Societal Wellbeing Causal Chain

A society’s natural resource utilization behavior is the primary determinant of both the society’s economic activity level—the mix and levels of goods and services produced and consumed by the society; and its waste emission level—the mix and levels of air, land, and water borne toxins produced by the society. The society’s economic activity level and waste emission level, in combination, determine the society’s population level/material living standard combination—its level of “societal wellbeing”.

The Societal Wellbeing Causal Chain



Our Predicament

In the case of both America and the world, our existing natural resource utilization behavior is unsustainable. The cornucopian worldview held by industrialized societies regards Nature as something to be conquered, as we seek to achieve perpetual population growth, perpetual living standard improvement, and perpetual economic growth through our ever-increasing utilization of the earth's "unlimited" natural resources.

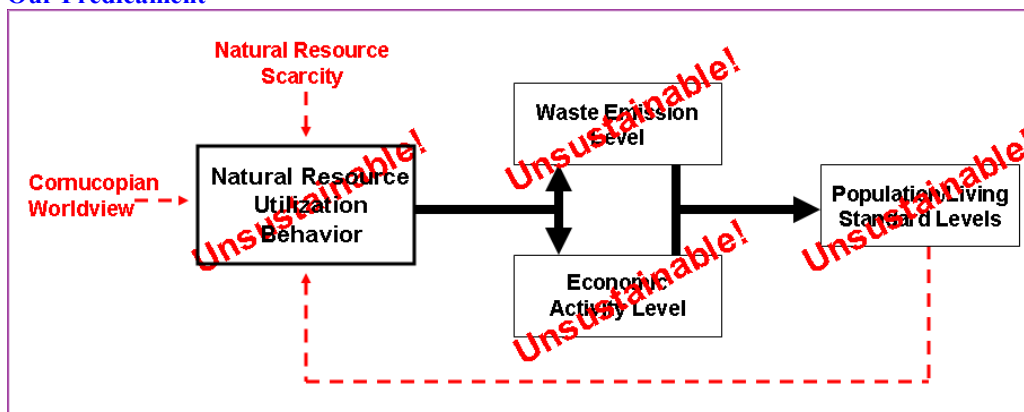
Societies that have yet to achieve industrialized status typically aspire to it, and therefore share the cornucopian worldview held by industrialized societies.

As a natural consequence of our exploitive cornucopian worldview, we persistently deplete renewable natural resource reserves that are critical to our existence—such as water, croplands, grazing lands, forests, and wildlife—at rates that exceed those at which Nature can replenish them; and we persistently deplete nonrenewable natural resource reserves that are critical to our existence—such as fossil fuels, non-energy minerals, and metals—which Nature does not replenish.

Through our distorted worldview and our dysfunctional natural resource utilization behavior, we are systematically eliminating the natural resources upon which our way of life and our very existence depend; neither our current worldview nor our persistent overexploitation of natural resources is sustainable:

- Available supplies associated with many of the natural resources upon which we depend are becoming increasingly scarce, and will soon be insufficient to enable our existing natural resource utilization behavior.¹
- Atmospheric, aquatic, and terrestrial natural habitats that are critical to our existence are being degraded at rates that exceed those at which Nature can regenerate them.

Our Predicament

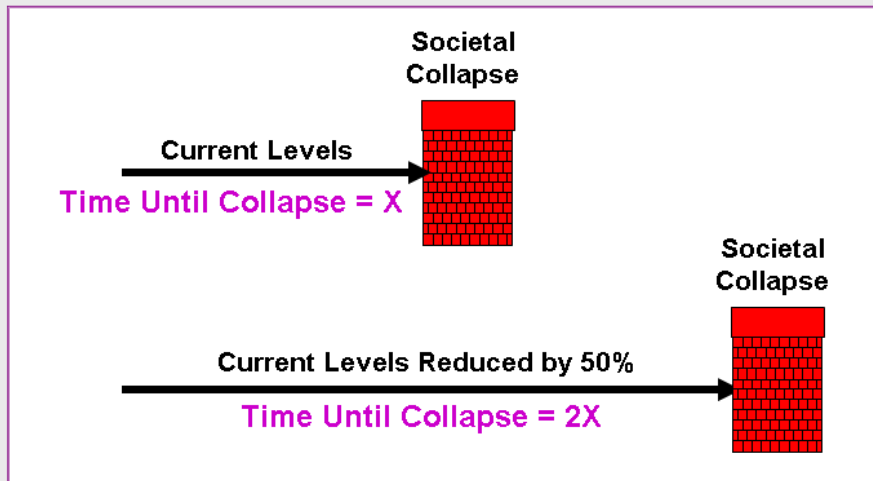


As a result, our current economic activity levels and population/material living standard levels are unsustainable as well; continuous increases associated with either or both are physically impossible.

Solution

Unfortunately, the resolution to our predicament cannot be achieved merely by stabilizing or reducing our economic activity levels, by stabilizing or reducing our waste emission levels, or by stabilizing or reducing our population levels and/or living standards (consumption levels). Such efforts target problems derived from the root cause of our predicament rather than targeting the root cause itself, and are simply a waste of time and resources.

Sustainability Thought Exercise



Suppose we reduce our population levels by 50% - instantaneously, and reduce our toxic emission levels by 50% - instantaneously, and reduce our total economic activity levels by 50% - instantaneously... If we fail to adopt sustainable natural resource utilization behavior in the process—i.e., choose to live on renewable natural resources exclusively—our 50% reductions will simply double the time interval between now and our societal collapse.

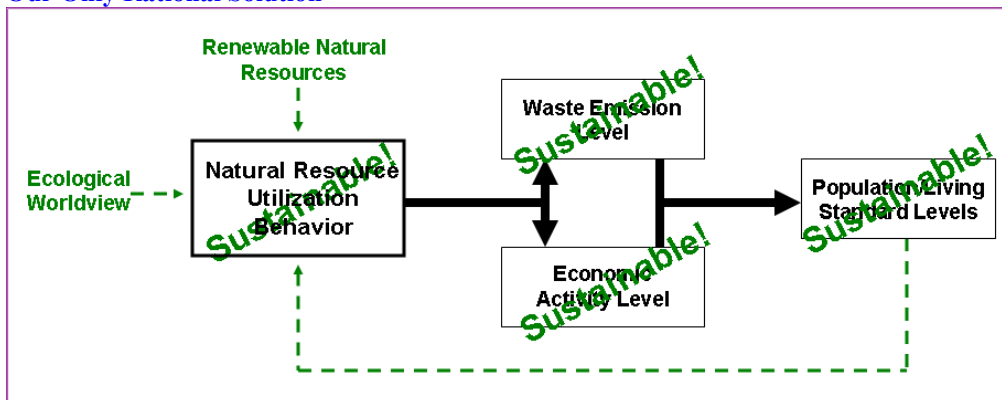
We will not achieve sustainability through reductions in our population levels, our toxic emission levels, and/or our economic activity levels; we will only defer our collapse. Sustainable natural resource utilization behavior is the fundamental prerequisite to a sustainable lifestyle paradigm.

So long as our natural resource utilization behavior remains unsustainable, our resulting economic activity levels, waste emission levels, and population/living standard levels cannot possibly be sustainable, irrespective of the amounts by which they are reduced.

Assuming that our goal, both as a society and as a species, is to optimize our societal wellbeing within the context of a sustainable lifestyle paradigm; the only rational resolution to our unsustainable economic activity levels, our unsustainable waste emission levels, and our unsustainable population/living standard levels is to engage in sustainable natural resource utilization behavior.

We must, both as a society and as a species, adopt an ecological worldview (immediately), through which we correctly regard our planet as a finite, resource-constrained ecosphere; and we must transition to a sustainable lifestyle paradigm (quickly), within which we exist exclusively on renewable natural resources—forever.

Our Only Rational Solution



The critical problems that are caused by our unsustainable natural resource utilization behavior—“unsustainable economic growth”, “climate change”, and “overpopulation”—will only be resolved when our natural resource utilization behavior becomes sustainable. Only when our natural resource mix consists entirely of renewable natural resources, utilized at levels less than or equal to the levels at which they are replenished by Nature, will our economic activity levels, our waste emission levels, and our population/living standard levels be sustainable as well.

In order to optimize our societal wellbeing—our domestic and global population levels and material living standards—going forward, we must stop hacking at the branches of our predicament, and strike at the root. Our survival, both as a society and as a species, is all about sustainable natural resource utilization behavior...

Footnote

(1) For details regarding impending US natural resource supply shortfalls see “On American Sustainability—Anatomy of a Societal Collapse”, pgs. 43-51, Chris Clugston, 2009 - <http://www.wakeupamerika.com/PDFs/On-American-Sustainability.pdf>.

Author Bio (Chris Clugston): For the past three years I have conducted extensive independent research into the area of sustainability, the goals of which are to quantify from a combined ecological and economic perspective the extent to which our American society is currently overextended—living unsustainably beyond our means—and to understand the causes, implications, and possible solutions associated with our predicament.

Prior to that I spent thirty years working with information technology sector companies in marketing, sales, finance, M&A, and general management—the last twenty as a corporate chief executive and management consultant. I received an AB/Political Science, Magna Cum Laude and Phi Beta Kappa from Penn State University, and an MBA/Finance with High Distinction from Temple University in Philadelphia, PA. I can be reached at cclugston “at” comcast “dot” net.