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### Sustainability: The Universal Solvent of Private Property Rights

By [Charles Battig](#)

The alchemists of old were diligently ambitious in their goals. These antecedents of modern chemistry were not hindered by a lack of knowledge of atomic structure and physical chemistry when it came to setting priorities. Lacking a nuclear reactor or knowledge of atomic reactions, they postulated the existence of “[The Philosopher’s Stone](#).” This mythical substance was thought to be able to turn base metals into gold, and endow eternal life and wisdom to its discoverer.

Another magical substance hypothesized was the “[universal solvent](#).” Such a substance would be able to dissolve all other substances, including gold. Philosophical discussions over what container could hold this universal solvent must have been lively. Aqua regia, a mixture of concentrated nitric and hydrochloric acids, was eventually discovered, and comes close to the definition. This “royal water,” named by the alchemists because of its ability to dissolve gold and the noble metals, was also thought to have therapeutic healing properties as well.

Far from the realm of primitive physical sciences, another universal solvent has been created by the progressive social engineers. It is able to limit personal freedoms, diminish private property rights, destroy the useful products of civilization and their means of production, deprive humanity of natural resources and their access, and impose hardship on the least prosperous members of humanity. I term it “The Progressives’ Stone,” as it can do all this and more. Regrettably, it is real and not mythical. It permeates all levels of our government.

“Sustainability” is the embodiment of the planner’s “Progressives’ Stone,” a universal societal solvent... infinitely elastic and open-ended in its ability to justify most any action taken in the name of social and environmental justice. It is the societal equivalent of the ancient “royal water” in its corrosive properties when employed against our constitutionally mandated unalienable rights of ordinary free citizens.

Documenting the origins of the “Philosopher’s Stone is a task for historians probing the Middle Ages. “The Progressives’ Stone” has a more recent and defined lineage. British economist [Barbara Ward’s](#) 1966 book [Spaceship Earth](#) advocated for sustainable development and a new international economic order linking the global environment and social justice. Population control was an inherent part of the message.

On this side of the Atlantic, Rachel Carson’s 1962 book, [Silent Spring](#) laid the groundwork for a message that found a receptive audience in guilt prone readers. She put a human face on the claimed crimes against the environment. Misuse of insecticides was translated into a fear of all insecticides at any level. DDT was made the poster child for environmental destruction. Bird deaths and egg thinning were offered as

evidence. Years later, many of the claims in her book were termed “[lies](#),” once they were subject to scientific review. In the interim, millions of innocent children have suffered malaria-related deaths in Africa from prohibition of DDT use, and the term “eco-imperialism” became a [book title](#).

As a formalized political doctrine, “Sustainability” was introduced by the 1987 “Our Common Future” report of the United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development, authored by Gro Harlem Brundtland, VP of the World Socialist Party. The official [U.N. website](#) contains the “Sustainability” definition: “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” The capitalized “S” serves to distinguish the U.N. definition from the mundane usage indicating “lasting or continuing for a long time.” The U.N. presupposes an all-knowing ruling class that has unique knowledge of the present and of the future. In reality, the needs of the future are subject to change, and planning now for an unknowable future is the planner’s folly. Fredrick Hayek aptly described this as the “[Fatal Conceit](#).” Who knew a century ago that commonplace sand (silica) would become essential to our transistor and integrated-circuit world of today?

Much of the U.N.’s vision of “Sustainability” was eventually incorporated into official U.S. Federal policy by President Clinton. He established the “[President's Council on Sustainable Development](#)” by executive Order No. 12852, dated June 29, 1993. It published the [1999 report](#) “Towards A Sustainable America... Advancing Prosperity, Opportunity, and a Healthy Environment for the 21st Century.” Perhaps well intentioned in its Utopian vision of our future, it has become a weapon of mass destruction against many of the visions of our Founding Fathers, and our basic freedoms.

Professional planners have adopted these precepts, and their official organization, the American Planning Association, has a formalized [policy guide](#). The Environmental Policy Agency has [its own](#). Business has learned how to [make a profit](#) from it. Enthusiastic application of sustainability concepts has provided the commercial world with financial rewards. Do-more-with-less is the way to greater profits and positive public perception.

Like a Madison Avenue brainstormed advertising mantra, “Sustainability” now appears throughout the media and in governmental policy requirements. If it is not “Sustainable,” it must be stopped, altered, or mitigated, until the project has met prescribed guidelines. “Sustainability” has been elevated in governmental policy to a level higher than our Constitutional unalienable rights. Unlike the business model, “Sustainability” in the governmental sphere has uses beyond a more efficient government. [Henry Lamb](#) and [others](#) recognized the threat to personal property rights early on. [Tom DeWeese](#) has been sounding the alarm for decades.

A visit to your local governmental planning board or board of supervisors should convince you that “Sustainability” is the universal solvent able to shut down private property rights. Want to build a home on your dream location? No... it is not sustainable to the environment. Want to add on to your home... no, it imposes non-sustainable burdens on the wildlife. Nor are golf courses, ski resorts, livestock, soil tilling, fences, industry, septic fields, roads, logging, dams and reservoirs, power line and fiber optic projects “Sustainable,” if so designated by local or Federal government. Get out of “Sustainability” Jail cards are called proffers or mitigating off-sets; such extra costs make surviving projects more expensive for the increasingly poor taxpayer.

Increase your chances of living a sustainable life as envisioned by our Founding Fathers by challenging “Sustainability” as envisioned by government planners. Private property rights are an endangered species not protected by “Sustainability.”

*Charles Battig, MD, Piedmont Chapter president, VA-Scientists and Engineers for Energy and Environment (VA-SEEE). His website is [www.climateis.com](http://www.climateis.com)*