

Environmentalism & Altruism



Sharing things and helping other people may damage the economy, but it's a great way to decrease our environmental footprint. Since the earth's resources are finite, competing to outconsume one another is a self-destructive course of action. This, however, is the natural outcome of capitalism, with its focus on [money](#) at the expense of all else.

As [technology](#) has increased the impact of human activity on our environment, concerns about environmental matters such as pollution, climate change, resource depletion are being treated increasingly seriously. However, the USA and some other countries still pursue economic gain above all else. Such arrogant short-sightedness would be unthinkable from a less powerful nation, and does at least highlight the problems of highly concentrating power.

The simple dogma of '*do whatever makes money*' has led to increasingly pathological [overconsumption](#)

. The ethos of competition has produced societies of busy, stressed people often lonely and [depressed](#)

. As our economic system steadily grows in scope, ever more aspects of life are [professionalises](#)

, decreasing opportunities for unpaid, heart felt action by crowding it out through an increased volume of commercially motivated transactions. By commodifying our [relationships](#)

- with other people, the wider community and the natural environment as a whole - ever more activity is brought into the [zero-sum](#)

, competitive model. The [wasteful practices associated with the profit motive](#)

are damaging our social and the natural environment. However, our current problems may look small in years to come, as new technologies such as genetic engineering and nanotechnology are magnifying the potential for human impact on the environment.

As a species, we have a decision to make about how (some would say whether) we want to

develop genetic engineering. It well illustrates the dangers of taking a proprietary approach. One the one hand, a successful development would yield great dividends in the form of sales, royalties from [intellectual property rights](#) etc. On the other a failure could cause catastrophic damage to the environment. The cost to planet earth of disastrous environmental damage would go not only exceed the resources of any company or state to put right, it could go beyond any financial reckoning. [Standard economics](#) doesn't have a lot to say about calculations of this nature. Although alternative models are being developed, a fundamental rethink is necessary if we are to overcome this risk, for the simple reason that for a *limited liability* company the calculation becomes a lot easier - any costs incurred over and above the value of its assets can be safely (sic.) ignored since if a disaster were to happen the company could be declared bankrupt and wouldn't be liable.

Many countries have legislation to try to safeguard public health and the environment. However, even without the very significant problem of [rent-seeking](#) , such legislation cannot be expected to be very effective, with technologies developing so quickly, and potential revenues so large. The need for such *ad hoc* extra rules is in itself an admission of one of the more serious [problems of capitalism](#) ; the 'free market' is unsuitable means to ensure people safeguard the environment - the one resource which mankind really *cannot* afford to lose.

Environmental safety seems unlikely to be assured under capitalism, which insulates people from their affect on their environment. [Altruistic economics](#) , by contrast, encourages people to consider the impact of their actions on others.

http://www.altruists.org/ideas/one_world/environmentalism/