

## On The Environment

By Thomas. R. Cuba

Or more appropriately titled, *How We Interact with the Environment*.

Posting an opinion on the environment may be the hardest for me. I am attempting it because I was asked to do so. Why is it hard? The depth of sub issues and intertwined tug-of-wars make the topic a Gordian knot of logic, emotion, science, mantra, and fear. Where to start?

How about with WHY? Why do we need to manage or maintain or care for the environment?

As a biologist I see that there are two essential reasons for maintaining our environment. One can be seen very selfishly, the other altruistically. I can see it as a naturalist and a realist as well.

The selfish reason is this: If we destroy the environment it will be *Homo sapiens* who arrives next on the list of endangered species. We don't want that. But it is arrogantly absurd to believe we will, or even can, kill the planet. We can change it, but cannot kill it. So we must save it for ourselves, for our children. Oops, just jumped into altruism.

Or did I? On an individual level it is altruistic to save the planet for our children, but on a species level, as Mankind, we are only saving it for Mankind. Still selfish. Eventually, do we save the planet for the sake of the planet?

Ok, wait. That is much too large a topic and will be much too controversial. I will really need to set up a series of posts on this. And I will; maybe as issues come up.

One more thing though. In asking *why* or how we *should* care for the environment the question of arrogance arises. Simply, what makes anyone think We know what's best for the planet anyway?

At one end of the spectrum is a school of thought that all life is precious. In all species. It should all be saved. If we save all life as the ultra-purist would have it, do we save the virus which causes Yellow Fever or HIV? If we say "No," then where do we draw the line? At bacteria? Sure some will harm us like *Salmonella* but others are indispensable. We can't grow peas, make beer, or make cheese without bacteria. Rodents, vermin, snakes? If we say "Yes, we can fight disease," are we really just doing what man has always done? Aren't we simply making the same "top of the food chain" choices we always made but using a different standard?

Wait. One more thing. There is a group of people who will find fault with Mankind in every action. Some of the comments are enough to make us feel guilty about being successful as a species. Enough to make us feel bad about being at the top of the heap.

I ask, what's wrong with being at the top of the food chain? If we weren't there...what would be?

See. It gets complicated.

If we save all life, I can tell you as a biologist that we would be fighting against the planet and its penchant for evolution, extinction, and change. Against nature. Against our Human Nature and against the natural forces of the planet itself.

I use the above paddle to stir the pot of ignorance and dogma so that the reader can grasp some basic problems in our relationship with the environment.

1. We don't know everything.
2. We need to acknowledge that at whichever end of the value spectrum we find ourselves, that our desire to *DO* something is rooted in a value judgement.
3. It is part of nature that we are in a position to both change and preserve the environment.

And finally, these 2 things:

1. *We do need to be responsible: avoid waste and intentional abuse.*
2. *We don't really know enough about the planet to actually save it yet.*

Still, everyone needs a guidepost. Since I work in the environmental field, I need one more than most. I found it one day years ago when embroiled in developing environmental regulations. I made it into a poster. It says:

*"You can't legislate Natural Law."*