

Study Questions, Week 15

Topics for the Week:

Sustainable Development, Population & Environment

Readings for the Week:

Population Reports. 2000. The Earth and its people/Toward a livable future. *Population Reports* 28(3).

Schnaiberg & Gould, ch. 9 & 10.

Questions:

- (1) How do current demographic trends differ in industrialized and developing countries? Which poses a greater threat to the environment?
- (2) What do current trends in various important global environmental issues suggest about the possibility for sustainable development?
- (3) Identify various approaches to measuring the effect that population change has on the environment. What are the strengths and weaknesses of each approach?
- (4) The essay "Toward a Livable Future" demonstrates that progress towards sustainability has been made in some realms. What are the most important actions that are necessary to encourage sustainable development?
- (5) The treadmill of production rests on the notion that economic growth is good. What are some of the unexamined assumptions underlying the treadmill? Who benefits from such policies, and who bears the costs of such policies? What are some effects on the environment?
- (6) Identify two barriers that prevent us from continuing our present trajectory. Give concrete examples of these barriers, and explain how each limits economic growth. Can we sustain this situation over the long run? How or why not?
- (7) What is meant by the term "sustainability?" Why is this term ambiguous, and what potential problems could this lead to? What are some concrete examples of how sustainability is being put into practice? For each example, suggest a definition for the term sustainability.
- (8) What does the case of *loco* production in Chile tell us about regulatory approaches to achieve sustainability? About community-based approaches to achieve sustainability? Are there other ways Chileans can address this problem and encourage sustainable *loco* production?
- (9) Why is it difficult to achieve sustainable development? What barriers stand in the way? Suggest specific technological, economic and social barriers, and explain how they impede the transition to a sustainable society.
- (10) Identify three levels of difficulties inherent in efforts to deal with the political and scientific issues that arise in the transition to a sustainable society. For each level, provide concrete examples and explain why and how sustainability is impeded.

(11) Why do environmental tensions endure? Explain, taking into consideration the ecological, economic and social benefits of the treadmill of production.

(12) Is it possible to construct a sustainable society without conflict? What types of conflict might result from efforts to remake the treadmill of production? What are the most likely outcomes of these conflicts? What can be done to ensure more equitable and sustainable outcomes?

(13) What role does politics play in a transition to a sustainable society? Have American political leaders taken this necessity seriously? Explain, and cite evidence to support your response.