

Neo-Malthusians

and

Their Critics

Plan of Action

6/21/06

(1) Teaching About Demographic Research

(2) Neo-Malthusians and their Critics

Ehrlich vs. Simon

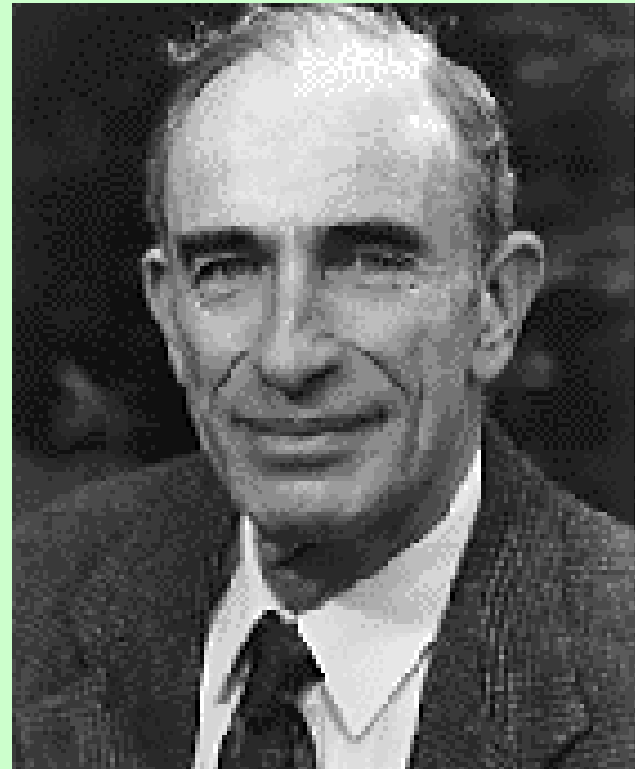
Ehrlich vs. Commoner

(3) The population vs. technology debate

Cast of Characters

Paul Ehrlich

1932 –



Julian Simon

1932 – 1998



Barry Commoner

1917 –



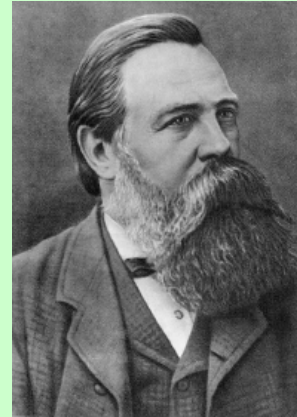
The Great Debate Revisited

Malthus:



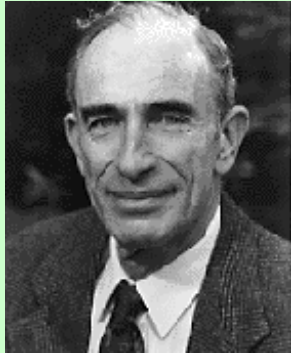
“The power of population is indefinitely greater than the power in the earth to produce subsistence for man”

Engels:



“The productive power at the disposal of mankind is immeasurable. The productivity of the land can be infinitely increased by the application of capital, labor and science.”

The Great Debate Revived



Ehrlich:

“The causal chain of [environmental] deterioration is easily followed to its source. Too many cars, too many factories, too much detergent, too much pesticide, multiplying contrails, inadequate sewage treatment plants, too little water, too much carbon dioxide – all can be traced easily to *too many people.*”

Simon:



“The plain fact is that, given some time to adjust to shortages, the resource base does not remain fixed. People create more resources of all kinds.”

Simon vs. Engels

“Skilled and creative people require an appropriate economic and political framework that provides incentives for working hard and taking risks, enabling their talents to flower and come to fruition. The key elements of such a framework are respect for property, fair and sensible rules of the market that are enforced equally for all, and the personal liberty that accompanies economic freedom.”

Ehrlich's Formulation

$$I=PAT$$

I = Environmental Impact

P = Population

A = Affluence

T = Technology

Commoner's Question

“Are we driving the ecosphere to destruction simply by our growing numbers? By our greedy accumulation of wealth? Or are the machines which we have built to gain this wealth~~~the magnificent technology that now feeds us out of neat packages, that clothes us in man-made fibers, that surround us with new chemical creations~~~at fault?”

Commoner's Assertion

“In modern industrial societies the most important link between society and the ecosystem on which it depends is technology.”

~Commoner, 1971, p. 176

“Picture a mutual fund manager whose bad investments have caused his fund to lose value for each of the last 30 years, but who nonetheless has built the reputation of fundmeister Peter Lynch. If you can do so, you can envision Paul Ehrlich.

“But have Ehrlich’s preposterous predictions hurt his reputation? Far from it – they’ve made him both celebrated and rich.

“The reason Ehrlich keeps blowing it boils down to a single word: technology. It is Ehrlich’s *bête noire*. So he just ignores its many benefits.”

~Michael Fumento, 1997,
Investor’s Business Daily

Discussion Questions

- (1) What role do values play in the P×A×T debate?
- (2) Which position contributes most to sustainable development?