

Welcome to the EJSD

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Welcome to the *Electronic Journal of Sustainable Development*! Yes, a new journal. We know that there are already thousands of academic journals and we realise that you may be asking yourself, “What added value could this one possibly offer?” Or, perhaps more pertinently, “is this really a valuable use of scarce resources – is it, indeed, sustainable?”

To the latter, we would answer, “We hope so.” To the former, we would point out that, in our opinion, prior to the *EJSD* there was no journal which offered a proper forum for critical discussion of the increasingly important issues relating to sustainable development (SD). Sure, there are journals that occasionally include discussions of the concept or some aspect of SD. And there are journals that are exclusively devoted to promoting particular interpretations of SD. But the former are far from exclusively devoted to SD, while the latter tend to be predicated on interpretations of SD that might be described as of questionable utility.

So, here we are: the first issue of the *EJSD* – a journal which seeks to address all aspects of sustainable development. And, as you will see, while we feel that SD can be a valid construct, we are not averse to publishing articles that are fundamentally sceptical of the concept. We believe that it is better to discuss the problems with SD than to bury one’s head in the sand and hope that those problems will disappear.

Tackling this head on, in the first of this issue’s four double-blind peer-reviewed articles, Neil Manson notes that “The obvious thing for a philosopher to do in a special issue about the nature of X is to explicate the concept of X. That cannot be done if X is an essentially vague concept.” Manson responds to the challenge by providing what he calls a “ground-up” approach, focussing on irreversibility and related concerns, so that

philosophers and others will be better able to define SD and other associated concepts more clearly.

Wilfred Beckerman offers a quick survey of various interpretations of SD and reaches some trenchant conclusions. For example, responding to the seemingly widespread suggestion that SD be interpreted to mean continuously rising average welfare, he observes, “But even if it were feasible to follow [such] a sustainable development path for the rest of eternity it is not clear why such a path has any particular moral force.” Beckerman suggests that SD may simply be a ruse to justify public policy conclusions that could not be reached through more conventional economic analysis. He is also blunt when it comes to approaches to SD predicated on assumptions regarding the rights of future generations: “it is difficult to see how some future unborn generation can ‘have’ – in the present tense – anything at all, including rights.”

Jim Dorn argues that true sustainable development should be directed towards expanding “choices open to individuals”. He rejects state-led development and offers an essentially process-oriented interpretation of SD:¹ “In a free society, there is no pre-determined optimal growth rate that can be known to central planners; the optimum is whatever market participants freely choose based on their preferences, including their preferences for leisure and for present versus future consumption.” In so doing, Dorn at least partly answers Beckerman’s objection to SD, albeit by offering a non-standard interpretation.

Pierre Desrochers and Karen Lam address the nature of sustainable development indirectly, by showing how market incentives have been a key driver of waste reduction and recycling for far longer than there has been an “environmental” movement.

In addition to the peer reviewed articles, we include

in this issue two book reviews and one Note, all of which come highly recommended.

We'd like to thank all those people who have helped get the *EJSD* off to a flying start, including of course the authors of the pieces within this issue and also a special mention to Kristen Veblen, who did a wonderful job as Managing Editor, liaising with authors, website developers and generally chivvying us all along.

Notes

1. For a discussion of outcome versus process oriented versions of SD see Morris, J. "Reconceptualising 'Sustainable Development'", in Morris, J. (ed) *Sustainable Development: Promoting Progress or Perpetuating Poverty*, London: Profile Books, 2002, pp. 7–20.