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Untitled

Anyone who has anything to do with the environmentalism movement, whether in support of it or in denial of it has seen the photographs of a solitary polar sitting on an ice-patch only slightly larger than itself, to portray the damage the melting ice-caps is causing and to foreshadow the impending doom of the cute furry ball that you are looking at. This image is also supposed to foreshadow our own impending doom as humans, as we allow the ice caps to melt increasingly faster and the oceans start inching their way excruciatingly slowly onto our continental fringes like a monster from a bad horror movie.

I am going to tell you right now, this topic (and this essay) is not a happy one. Based on the evidence that is mounting, the ending is not going to be a good one. Not for humans at any rate. So don't get upset when you finish reading, and you are not cheered up. That is not my goal. My goal is to explain the three pillars of sustainability, so you know what the heck I'm even talking about when I say sustainability. At the same time, I will ask you to consider whether you are sustainable or not. Finally, I will prove to you how we are not sustainable nor that we ever will be.

In order to be sustainable, environmentalists have identified three goals to achieve, also known as the three pillars of sustainability: equity, environment and economy. These terms can be more simply thought of as people, planet and prosperity. The basic idea is that, as identified by environmentalists, to be a sustainable society you need success in these three qualities: having a social mindset that sustainability is an important goal, the physical practice of conserving or preserving natural resources, and a thriving economy to fund the necessary innovations to

conserve those very resources. Without one of these qualities, it is very difficult to have the other two, and without a complete balance, the society's way of life is inherently unsustainable, which is another way of saying that it will die.

Are you sustainable? Have you fully embraced the mindset of living sustainably? Because the odds are, you haven't. Think about the phrase reduce, reuse, recycle. Did you know there's a specific order to those three words? The first step you are supposed to take is to reduce your use. For example, think about that painful moment when in the middle of class, someone fiddling with their iPhone drops it, and has to check the damage. You know the moment I'm referring to. And when the victim (you) has discovered the screen is cracked, do you really need to run and get a new iPhone every time your screen gets cracked? Or take a step back: do you need to be handling your phone so much that the screen is very likely to drop and crack in the first place? Because being sustainable mentally is more than just using a refillable water bottle. It's about awareness of seemingly unconnected actions, and how the consequences might use or save resources down the road. In this case, if you think a second before you flip your iPhone around, and pocket it instead of seeing if it can do a complete 720 in the air before you catch it, that will mean one less iPhone that has to be replaced, one less easily-breakable, nearly-unfixable product that has to be created. Think about it for a second: multiply that scenario by the entire industrialized world. How many less iPhones do you think would need to have been produced in the year 2014 alone? How about since the creation of the iPhone? This reduction in production has not happened yet, because sustainability is more than just an individual action: it is a mindset, a way of life.

If you can't reduce, then reuse. Is your iPhone so badly damaged that it's not functional? Or is it the slick show-off that you're lacking? Yes, I know about the sex appeal of a gleaming

new iPhone, but I also know about the sex appeal of having clean water to drink. And if you can't reduce, and you can't reuse, then... and only then... should you recycle. Take it to Apple, have them produce a new iPhone, just for you, and let them recycle the old body responsibly. But this act, it is such a sad one. This society has actually *backtracked* on sustainable production. Think for a moment, those of you familiar with the Nintendo video gaming system: how often do you hear "Oh, I still have my old N64, it still works fine" or "I still play my Gamecube, some of Nintendo's best games were on that system." You hear it pretty damn often given that the N64 is now a 19 year old piece of technology. But who still has a perfectly operating iPhone first generation? No one, because of Apple's business model of updates forcing you to constantly buy the new phone, simply because they feel like making apps incompatible or even changing the charger design... In a society where this regression has not only been allowed to occur but has pervaded it, sustainability and awareness of limited physical resources is clearly not prioritized. Strike One.

My next point: environment. Where do I even begin? Let's take the latest US elections as evidence. Because 37% of this country was motivated enough to vote, we made Jim Inhofe the most powerful man in the world on environmental action (besides Barack Obama) and he believes that climate change is a Weather Channel hoax. That event, however, has further political implications which are outside the scope of this essay. I am personally interested in the Great Pacific Garbage Patch, or perhaps any US highway roadside, or perhaps even what lurks under the bushes in your very front yard. Trash. Heaps of it. So much trash that we have run out of ideas of where to put it, that we have to resort to dumping it in the ocean, and consequently dumping it down fishes' throats, or strangling it around a tortoise's neck. Is that seriously the best we can do? The most creative we can get? The most sincere respect we can garner for the

wildlife, which has struggled just as much as we have for a spot on this rare patch of life in the middle of the universe? It becomes a problem when the biggest sledding attraction in my hometown is called *Mt. Trashmore* because you're literally sledding down a retired landfill. So... just because you picked up your loose cup off the ground or perhaps a half-filled beer can of the day and put it into the trash, it does not make you or society consciously concerned about the healthcare of our planet. Strike Two.

The economy is perhaps the greyest area of them all, and perhaps the most supportive to future action presently. True, about seven years ago now, we suffered our greatest economic failure since the Great Depression in the 1930s. However, it is significant to note that recently each passing month has surpassed the latest highs, and unemployment seems to continuously be staying constant or going down, all good signs to slow economic recovery. At the same time, we have also seen headlines from visionaries such as Elon Musk claiming the billions being invested in safer private transportation, innovations for public power sources, and renewable energy. In fact, one claim has been made that solar panels will be very close to affordable in the free market by the 2016 US elections, which will begin to significantly challenge the oil domination on the consumer market, and for the first time putting efforts into sustainable energy into a public debate, forcing readers such as you to ask why sustainable energy shouldn't be a reality if it is affordable. Something that lurks in the nightmares of every oil company executive. Considering all three pillars, this seems to be the most promising currently, which is a start.

However, the story does not quite end there. I will ask you now, for the sake of argument (and proving my point) what if we had all three components. Would we really be sustainable? You are up against 7 billion bodies that must consume and reproduce. Even if we hold onto our cracked and beaten iPhones like battle scars, even if we invented a machine to suck up every tiny

piece of the Pacific's plasticky soup, even if we invented a machine that would both replace oil as fast as we used it *and* to negate the harmful, *excessive* greenhouse effect, would we be sustainable? Can this planet sustainably host 7 billion human beings? To help answer this question, pretend you are a US government agent who has been handed a world that has met these three standards. They have just recently been achieved, so no standard for measuring the success of sustainability has been created yet. What will you do, as the sole member of the Sustainability Measurement and Achievement Committee, to judge the society sustainable? Will you count the number of "gas guzzling" cars as opposed to "environmentally friendly" cars on the streets? Even if you had all the manpower in the world and that was possible, what would the determining ratio be? Will you measure all the matter produced for the US and compare it to all the matter thrown away? Again, how would you do that? Even if I had tasked you to measure the 300 million Americans rather than the 7 billion people, the task would still be too daunting to take on. It would be impossible.

And yet... there is that goal. Every day scientists, environmentalists, volunteers march forward to strive towards that goal. Why? Because it's the only way this planet has a chance of sustaining human life. A friend of mine last night said "if you give the environment cancer, it gives you cancer right back". I would like to think the opposite is true too. We who are concerned with the environment's welfare cannot change society's mind, but we can change people's minds. One person at a time, keep a cell phone here, use a refillable water bottle there, and eventually the mindset might just change. With the economy indicating the possibility of real innovations coming quickly, the only question remains, will they come quickly enough? Perhaps. And perhaps not. But in the meantime, we still have those cute polar bears to watch. Right?