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Unearthed: The Economic Roots Of Our Environmental Crisis



Synopsis

In *Unearthed: The Economic Roots of Our Environmental Crisis*, Kenneth M. Sayre argues that the only way to resolve our current environmental crisis is to reduce our energy consumption to a level where the entropy (degraded energy and organization) produced by that consumption no longer exceeds the biosphere's ability to dispose of it. Tangible illustrations of this entropy buildup include global warming, ozone depletion, loss of species diversity, and unmanageable amounts of nonbiodegradable waste. Degradation of the biosphere is tied directly to human energy use, which has been increasing exponentially since the Industrial Revolution. Energy use, in turn, is directly correlated with economic production. Sayre shows how these three factors are invariably bound together. The unavoidable conclusion is that the only way to resolve our environmental crisis is to reverse the present pattern of growth in the world economy. Economic growth is motivated by social values. Key among them are the desire for wealth and consumer values including gratification, convenience, and acquisition of goods. Sayre maintains that economic growth can be reversed only by eliminating these social values in favor of others more conducive to environmental health. Eliminating these values will involve major changes in lifestyle within industrial societies generally. Only with such changes in lifestyle, he argues, does human society as we know it have a chance of survival. Clearly written and thoroughly documented, this book provides a comprehensive overview of our complex environmental predicament.

"With unerring logic and science, Kenneth Sayre dissects the origins of the ecological crisis and points to the necessary recalibration of industrial societies with the laws of thermodynamics and ecology. It is a radical book in that he gets to the heart of what ails us, and it charts a course toward a future grounded in authentic hope."

•David W. Orr, Oberlin College

"Sayre's assessment forces all seeking a sustainable future to reexamine the preeminence accorded to clean energy. *Unearthed* uniquely combines thermodynamics and ethics to challenge and broaden readers' understandings of the systemic issues we face. Assembled and presented with piercing clarity, *Unearthed* constructs a brilliant framework for making sense of our quiet, but growing crises."

•Felipe Witchger, IHS Cambridge Energy Research Associates

"Kenneth M. Sayre's *Unearthed: The Economic Roots of Our Environmental Crisis* constitutes a major and significant contribution to our understanding of the grave ecological crisis facing humanity. It covers the complete picture, from the basic physical causes of the destruction of our environment to the sociological or anthropological forces that condition our self-destructive actions. The work not only is a brilliant and mind-sweeping piece of diagnosis and prognosis, but it goes all the way to point towards possible solutions."

Dr. Fernando del R o Haza, Laboratorio de Termodin mica, Universidad Aut noma Metropolitana, Iztapalapa, Mexico

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Customer Reviews

Kenneth M. Sayre is professor of philosophy and director of the Philosophic Institute at the University of Notre Dame. He is the author of numerous books ranging in topic from Plato to cybernetics to public values. His books include Values in the Electric Power Industry (1977), Plato's Literary Garden (1995), and Parmenides' Lesson (1997), all published by the University of Notre Dame Press.

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