

April 30, 2009

<http://www.readthespirit.com/ourvalues/2009/04/hoffman-4-praising-dark-green.html>

In Praise of Dark Greens: Do we really want “Green” to fade?

THIS WEEK, I'm welcoming Dr. Andrew Hoffman, a leading expert in balancing our desires for development and environmental health. [Please, add your Comments this week to this important series.](#)



And here is Dr. Hoffman...

All this week, we've been talking about the complex challenges facing the Green movement. In the end, here's the danger Greens face:

As Green goes mainstream—it fades.

When Clorox introduces its new line of Green Works™ cleaners, GE develops wind turbines under its Ecomagination program, Toyota develops its Hybrid Synergy Drive train, or Matsushita increases lithium-ion battery production, these are not examples of “Green” products; they are examples of companies attacking new and profitable market segments and hastening the market shift that's already underway.

I can see “Green,” as we have known it, fading in my MBA classes on environmental strategy—even as these classes explode from the domain of a fringe group of socially minded students. Now, mainstream business students see environmental issues as critical to corporate success. This is just becoming the way we do business.

That's why, in the end, we need those sometimes troublesome “Dark” Greens.

They continually warn us about compromise and push the frontier of environmental issues. Dark Greens keep our eye on the urgency of issues like climate change. Where the pragmatism of Bright Greens can lead to compromise and further analysis, Dark Greens remind us that time is limited and solutions must be bolder than politics may allow.

The problem is that the Dark Greens are losing their power and voice. They're becoming marginalized, either by their own activities or the way they're often cast in extreme relief against the more moderate Bright Greens.

In my own research, I have found a strong positive correlation between the size of an organization's budget and the number of corporate ties it engages. The implication is obvious: The Bright Greens actively engage with corporations, they have more money and therefore they have more influence than the Dark Greens. This is both unfortunate for Dark Green groups and bad for the movement as a whole.

The Dark Green message is needed now more than ever. Here's why—and here's the most provocative point I want to raise this week: Only an appeal to deeply held morals and values—either to recover them or perhaps to reform some of them—can move us where we truly need to go.

As Aldo Leopold pointed out in 1949, no important change in our ethical appreciation of nature can ever be accomplished “without an internal change in our intellectual emphasis, loyalties, affections and convictions.”

Only when the emission of CO₂ is seen as morally or ethically wrong (or even as a sin) will we be able to deal with climate change just as we abolished slavery. The breadth and depth of the shift makes this comparison apt.

The solution is not merely technological, economic or political. In the concluding chapter of "Beyond the Limits," scientist Donella Meadows and her co-authors argued that the solution to the environmental collapse predicted by their models "will have to be, above all, a societal transformation that permits the best of human nature rather than the worst to be expressed and nurtured."

What do you think about these provocative issues we've raised?

Can we hope to reach the level of moral reflection and perhaps even a deep change in some of our values—the kind of transformative change that we need to survive this challenge?