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Technology in Society

Volume 17, Issue 3, 1995, Pages 311-326

The concept of sustainable development: its origins and ambivalence

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[https://doi.org/10.1016/0160-791X\(95\)00008-F](https://doi.org/10.1016/0160-791X(95)00008-F)

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Abstract

A four-part examination of the concept of sustainable development: its relation to the major philosophies of history as cyclical or progressive; its contemporary articulation in two key texts (*World Conservation Strategy*, 1980; and *Our Common Future*, 1987; related ideas for the extension or altering of development; and some critical issues raised by the wide adoption of sustainable development as a new name for the common good. The thesis is that the strength and weakness of this concept rests in its ambivalent bridging of both pro-growth developmentist and no-growth environmentalist concerns.



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— Carl Mitcham, who directs the Science, Technology, and Society Program at Pennsylvania State University, is currently serving as the Hennebach Visiting Professor in Humanities at the Colorado School of Mines in Golden, Colorado. His most recent books are *Philosophy of Technology in Spanish Speaking Countries* (Boston: Kluwer, 1993) and *Thinking through Technology: The Path between Engineering and Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994). This article is revised from a paper first read at conference of the Consejo Latino Americano de las Ciencias Sociales (CLACSO) held in Santiago, Chile, in late 1991.

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