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"How Would you Like your 'Sustainability,' Sir? Weak or Strong? A Reply to my Critics"

Beckerman, Wilfred

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This article concentrates on the Jacobs and Daly criticisms (*Environmental Values*, Spring 1994) of my earlier article in the same journal (Autumn 1994) criticising the concept of "sustainable development." Daly and Jacobs agreed with my criticisms of "weak" sustainability, but defended "strong" sustainability on the grounds that natural and manmade capital were "complements" in the productive process and that economists are wrong, therefore, in assuming that they are infinitely substitutable. This article maintains that they are confusing different concepts of "complementarity" and "substitutability." It is also argued that, in fact, they do both sell crucial passes in their defence of strong sustainability without providing any clear criteria for their abandonment of it in certain cases. It is also denied that the fact that environmental services may provide different satisfactions from those obtained from other goods and services elevates it to the status of some over-riding moral value, or that discounting future costs and benefits is "unfair" to future generations.

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