



Mr. Environmentalist?

It seems to me that the answer is yes, contrary to popular opinion. There are several varieties of conservatism, but in my view each of them should resonate with at least some aspects of environmental protection.

Let's start with social conservatives. What does it mean to have a "culture of life"? Shouldn't it mean objecting when companies emit pollution that causes large numbers of deaths, just to make a little extra money? It's true that the company doesn't actually desire to cause the deaths, but statistical evidence shows that air pollution in particular causes increased mortality on a large scale, just because so many people are exposed. If you're "pro-life," the idea of knowingly causing deaths in order to make money should be troubling.

Libertarians, it seems to me, should also resist the impulse to be reflexively against environmental regulation. Pollution is an invasion of the rights of victims to bodily integrity and protection of their property from harm by others. That's why someone like Richard Epstein can be a libertarian and still see a role for pollution control.

What about traditionalists? Old-fashioned conservatives believe in maintaining traditions as the glue that holds societies together. Conservatives of this stripe should be horrified by the destruction of endangered species and transformation of familiar landscapes by climate change. What is Vermont without maple sugar, or California without the snow-covered Sierras? What is America without bald eagles, redwoods, and fish in the ocean for the fisherman to catch? What is Florida without the Everglades?

Finally, there are freemarket economists. But as every econ student learns, markets don't work well in the presence of externalities, and pollution is a classic case.

Of course, it's quite possible that conservatives — like liberals — may find some environmental regulations to be unneeded or impractical. But this is no reason to approach the world with a presumption that environmental protection is bad. Thus, it should be no surprise that in a recent [book](#), Newt Gingrich supports environmental protection and wants it to become a Republican cause. His solutions may not meet with approval from everyone, but he's surely right that the basic goals of environmentalism should not belong to any one ideology or political party.