

Text of “A Global Challenge”

Quote from Herman Daly: “Current economic growth has uncoupled itself from the world and has become irrelevant. Worse, it has become a blind guide.”

Stephen Schneider: “It’s not growth per se, it’s quality of life that matters, and we have to find the means to continue [to] improve our quality of life, particularly for people at the bottom of society.”

Vandana Shiva: “We have defined wealth in terms of finance, and fictitious finance at that. The real wealth is biodiversity.”

James Leape: “Biodiversity is in sharp decline. What that really tells us is that the capacity of the planet to support life, to support us, is in decline.”

Stephen Schneider: “People locked in a profession that is heroically struggling to try to dollarize and discount everything as if everything in life is a cash flow transaction. Well, it isn’t. There are moral judgements. How much we spend on defence, on education, on health, on national parks, you know, on infrastructure: it’s a value judgement about what society thinks is important. Exactly the same thing in the area of the environment: how do you weigh the protection of a species versus the development of an economy? Well, those are legitimate trade-offs, and we need to do both. That takes a mental change that’s been evolving over a generation, and we’ve gotta to do it really fast or we gonna run out of time to prevent a lot of dangerous thresholds being crossed with irreversible tipping points.”

Vandana Shiva: “And that’s why we must celebrate Bhutan which has defined gross national happiness as the aspiration for a nation, not just for individuals. We need to shift away from the fiction of growth that allows the takeover of the Earth’s resources by a handful of corporations pushing more and more people to hunger and thirst, more and more people to poverty, and the planet to a very, very vulnerable and fragile position. We can protect biodiversity, have more food and have more happiness, of course, the greedy corporations will have less profit, and I think the planet needs their profits to decrease.”

Stephen Schneider: “We’ve gotta get on with the job now that we should have gotten on with 30 years ago, and we have to do a little panic buying to be able to prevent the really dangerous outcomes that we are much closer to because we dropped the ball 30 years ago by saying it’s too expensive, and now the same old forces of darkness are saying it’s too expensive, and we don’t know, because they don’t wanna lose market share. So in order to make them rich, they are perfectly willing to take the risk for the rest of the planet about its long-term sustainability. The only way we can stop them is to say no through government rules. So you’ve got to set up rules that protect the commons, for health, for environment, for sustainability, for security. This is not a new idea, this is what we’ve been doing for hundreds of ideas, why we have treaties and alliances. What’s new is that it’s a side effect of our economic development that’s creating pressure at a global scale that now requires global scale governance. What we’re gonna say is we don’t want somebody else’s pollution destroying our climate anymore than they want our pollution destroying theirs, so we both agree to give up a little sovereignty just like we agree to step on the brakes at a traffic light, even though it’s violating a little bit of personal freedom.”

Terry Root: “We need to be paying for the trees that are being cut down, we need to be paying for the water that is not clean, we need to be paying for the air that is not clean, and that’s what it is gonna take.”

Neville Ash: “We tend to focus on values of GDP value at national level, but we need to be incorporating the values of natural capital into our financial and accounting system so we’d internalize those values. And the same is true for the costs we impose onto ecosystems.”

Pavan Sukhdev: “The economic consequences are huge. Our estimates based on just the study of the forest biomes is that we’re losing natural capital at the rate of between 2 and 5 trillion dollars per annum.”

Vandana Shiva: “We all receive water from her, we receive food from her, we receive air from her, anything that is received as a gift from the Earth and from nature has to be a commons, it cannot be privatized, that is why privatization of life forms through patents or water through privatization schemes driven by the World Bank, or the privatization of the atmosphere and the air through carbon trading and emissions trading are all illegal and illegitimate in a legal framework based on the Earth’s rights.”