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Talking points weeks 1

This week we began our research into environmentalism by looking at four sources; two for environmentalism and two against. The main argument for environmentalism is that it is not that hard economically or personally to live with less impact on the Earth, and that it will help future generations too. The main argument against environmentalism is that it is a liberal media fad that is completely overplayed, and that environmentalist ideals devastate our industrial economy. (and 'America'!)

One pro-environmentalism source we looked at was "No Impact Man." This was a documentary about a family in New York who tried to live for a year without making any impact on the environment. They gave up cars, public transit, grocery store food, packaging, waste, electricity, and anything else they could think of. Instead, they bought local food from the farmers market, took advantage of compost bins, used homemade cleaning supplies, lit with candles, kept warm with blankets, biked and used reusable container everywhere. The idea for the project was not only to bring attention to America's consumerism society through media (interviews, books etc.) attention of the project, but also to figure out what works and what doesn't. The theory was that it is possible to live without wasting so much and hurting the earth and depleting resources without truly depriving yourself. The documentary showed how by the end of the experiment, there were truly things that the family was willing to keep, including no TV, all farmers market foods, and no waste. The final advice was that environmentalism is community oriented. When one is connected to their community, they see those affected by things such as landfill pollution right in their own backyards. If individuals in a community bond together, there is no true need for government regulation. Additionally, the documentary touched on some of the counterarguments against environmentalism, such as the assumption that environmentalism is all about deprivation and saving the polar bears. It's about sustainability and your neighbors.

The other pro-environmentalism source was a talk by Ray Anderson entitled "The business logic of sustainability." Anderson, a carpet manufacturer, describes the process by which his business decreased their impact on the environment while also increasing profits. He talks about how he, a big businessman, read a book that changed his views on environmentalism. Anderson claims that impact is equal to the population times the affluence times the technology. His idea for his carpet business was to make technology decrease net environmental impact by making the equation $\text{impact} = \text{population} \times \text{affluence} \times \text{technology}$ equal to $\text{population} \times \text{affluence} / \text{technology}$. By incorporating green technology, such as saving thrown out carpets, using solar power, and using renewable resources, they were able to get onto a path to achieve this ideal. Essentially, this was done through a cyclical use of resources. The hope was that by 2020, the company would have zero impact. This evidence counteracts the anti-environmentalist view that it is not profitable to become a sustainable business, and therefore argues toward government regulation of businesses to become sustainable, because they are the biggest polluters, and therefore would have the most impact. This differs from the "No Impact Man" ideal of community and individual action. Anderson further states that sustainability helped their company through a recession. To end, he talks about how this is all for the future, to make sure that instead of digging up the earth and creating pollution that will hurt future generations, we must live sustainable in harmony with the environment, and the equations must become

impact=populations times affluence divided by technology times happiness. The idea is that as people become happier, they feel less need to over consume and waste.

On the anti environmentalism side, we looked at "Against Environmentalism," an essay by Michael S. Berliner. His argument is that environmentalism actually causes more danger to humans, because it essentially undoes all the improvements, such as industry, food production, and medicine that have been made. Without these, humans wouldn't exist. It would essentially kill people to become environmentalist, because they wouldn't have access to modern technology, so would be more likely to die from things like starvation or easily treatable diseases. Even energy and natural resources would be forgone, making us live in the dark ages. Humans should not be forced to sacrifice all this in the name of the polar bears. Even more, the environmentalist ideal of living with nature is not even plausible, because humans are so much above that. Overall, he claims that environmentalism goes against everything good for man by putting measly trees and shrubs above human development and well being.

The other anti environmentalism source we looked at was a short video called "If I Wanted America to Fail." This is a video speech that portrays environmentalism as a big political sham to bring America's power down. The main argument is that environmentalists want to get rid of industry and energy, which are vital for our economy and our jobs. This is what makes America the most prosperous nation in the world, and so it must remain. Additionally, it decreases the free market, which has created long lasting prosperity, by driving up prices on the cheap stuff and increasing regulation in the economy; Small businesses are no longer able to prosper because of all the regulations. Furthermore, it decreases jobs in the industries that are not environmentally conscious. The video portrays the media and the government as instrumental in creating this whole misconception. It has made people feel like environmentalism is the greater good in order to produce popular support for it. Schools and teachers have been especially instrumental in this viewpoint, and have constantly changed their minds. They compare environmentalism to Europe and make it sound so perfect, when in fact it has horrible consequences and the people promoting environmentalism are the worst culprits.

Overall, there is one point of debate about environmentalism: what is the point where humans are expected, or need, to sacrifice for nature? Is it really possible to live a sustainable and waste free life in our capitalist, consumerist economy? What are the economic consequences? What would we have to sacrifice? Is it even necessary?