

LECTURE / DISCUSSION / DEBATE
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND THE GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT

Terms and concepts to know:

“Tragedy of the Commons”	Ecosystem
Carrying capacity	Population explosion
Malthusianism	Sustainable development
Anthropocentrism	Contempocentrism
Market failure	“Greenhouse Effect”
Ozone depletion	Deforestation (biodiversity)
Desertification	“Acid rain”

Study and discussion questions:

1. What is the “tragedy of the commons?” How does it serve as a metaphor for the fate of the earth?
2. What accounts for the world’s population explosion? Describe its most likely consequences. What measures have been taken to slow population growth? Are these enough?
3. Describe how the world’s environmental problems are interrelated. Are you relatively optimistic or pessimistic about humanity’s ability to overcome these problems? Why?
4. Who should pay for pollution? What level of pollution should be tolerated? Should property owners be free to do as they want on their land? Explain your answers.
5. Few effective international agreements have been reached to solve the problem of global warming. Given the several difficulties associated with managing this problem, what creative international solutions can you think of? What would be the strengths and weaknesses of your solutions in the short term and in the long term?
6. Victor Wallis’s article draws distinctions between both capitalist and socialist responses to contemporary ecological thought. Examine his argument and discuss your position on his arguments.
7. Many activists are skeptical of Hawken’s “natural capitalism” approach. What do you think of Hawken’s ideas and of the notion of “free market environmentalism” in general?
8. Explain in your own words the ideas presented in the short documentary *The Ecological Footprint*. What sort of solutions presented in the video seem plausible for Americans to carry out?

Readings:

Hardin. “The Tragedy of the Commons.” *Science* 162. 1968.
Hawken. “Natural Capitalism.” *Mother Jones*. Mar/Apr 1997.
Wallis. “Capitalist and Socialist Responses to the Ecological Crisis.” *Monthly Review* Nov 2008.

Video:

The Ecological Footprint, a documentary film featuring Mathis Wackernagel, Ph.D.