

This course will build the question of “sustainability” into its curriculum through dedicating an entire lecture to examining the topic. In addition, throughout the introductory text, which we spend several weeks discussing, there will be numerous instances in which themes drawn from the environmentalist agenda will be highlighted. Given that the course is dedicated to criminal justice issues I cannot in good faith promise additional coverage to the issue without straying too broadly from the intended purpose of the course.

The subject matter, because it is a collective action issue, presents ideal fodder for sparking critical thinking on a pressing topic. The abiding question is addressing the challenge of what, if anything, is to be done regarding this crisis. Throughout the course I assume a value neutral approach to confronting the topic. My intent to avoid proselytization at all costs is a bedrock philosophical commitment in my pedagogy. Experience has repeatedly demonstrated that illustrating both sides of the debate invites a more vigorous exchange of ideas and deepens understanding. It is imperative in dispensing with an education dedicated to sharpening critical thinking skills that even ideas that some find repugnant, such as those offered by “climate deniers”, receive a respectful hearing. Therefore, the interaction will proceed under the ethos of a dispassionate, ideologically neutral exploration of the politics surrounding the sustainability agenda.

In order to preface the dialog I will be assigning a few essays drawn from the “Choices for Sustainable Living” (CSL) reader that was dispensed during our introductory session, in addition to assigning a video to be determined, in all likelihood “The Story of Stuff”. The format of these discussions throughout is to introduce the material and then dissect it. This often requires me to interject a few critiques, as well as draw out a few implications the students may not have considered. Below I will list a few themes around which my Socratic approach is ideally suited to address.

- Are environmentalists’ claims to be believed? (Outline the problem as presented in the video assigned.)
 - East Anglia email leaks & “Hockey stick controversy”
 - How might issues like this contributed to the dramatic reduction in the importance of confronting environmental issues?
 - Reasonable estimate: boost of 1.5 degrees over last century. How much of this is attributable to humanity? Why is this issue integral to the debate?
 - Inherent difficulty in making projections of any kind
 - Rhetoric of the debate: “digital brownshirts”, “warm-mongering”, the shift in focus from “global warming” to “climate change”, “watermelon” (green outside, red inside).
 - What might motivate those denying these claims?
- Assuming that claims of climate change are credible what kinds of measures are appropriate to improve the environment?
 - The limitations of international law/treaties—for example Chinese refusal to sign on, US unilaterally leaving the Kyoto Accord
 - Corporate resistance to regulation
 - Cap-and-trade
 - Recycling, with the exception of aluminum, is subsidized. Is this a worthwhile tax expenditure? Should failure to recycle result in a penalty?
 - Can technological advance bring us out of this crisis? For example, “frankenfoods”, nuclear power, and the invention of the car eliminating the enormous waste produced by horse driven transportation
 - Problems if we fail to address the topic—spread of tropical diseases, elevated sea levels, reduced biodiversity

- What are the implications of regulating consumption?
 - The sustainability of sustainability—ask students to reflect on the appeal of the lifestyles highlighted in the CSL readings, “freegans”.
 - Do we need a political solution to this issue or can economics generate a cure in addressing the issue of scarcity?
 - Reducing one’s carbon footprint means intruding inefficiency into the economy. This would eventually reduce population growth.
 - Where do human interests fit in with sustainability? (Thomas Malthus revisited)
 - What ethical responsibility do you owe to humanity several generations from the present?