
Can Capitalism Save the Environment?

Videos:

“Jason Hickel Says Economic Growth Is Killing Us | Doha Debates: Capitalism”
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bL&rVARSSn8> (3:37 minutes)

“Can capitalism save the planet? | Johan Norberg | The Capitalist Manifesto”
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mOiDI2JuBao> (2:28 minutes)

Guide:

The questions below will help students achieve a better understanding of the arguments made on either side of a contentious topic. Because these questions often touch upon statements made briefly in the videos, we recommend reading the questions before watching each video.

Students are encouraged to take notes during the videos, and it may be helpful for students to break into groups, each taking responsibility for only a few questions, before coming together for discussion.

Analysis Questions:

1. What are the opposing ideas in these two videos?
2. What is capitalism?
3. Jason Hickel said that growth is killing us. What did he mean by “growth” in this context?
4. Johan Norberg said: “Many say that the planet is being destroyed by greed.” Have you heard people say this? If so, what was the context? Did it have an impact on you?
5. Jason Hickel said the only way to reduce carbon emissions enough to save the planet is “actively reducing our energy use and scaling down industrial production.” How would that impact your quality of life? Would it be positive or negative? How would it impact the quality of life for people with different levels of wealth? Who would be impacted the most?
6. Johan Norberg said: “The Coronavirus pandemic was a giant experiment in degrowth.” What did he mean by this?
7. Jason Hickel suggested that we “free our public spaces from advertising, liberating all of us from the pressure to consume stuff we don’t need or even really want.” Do you feel this pressure from advertising? Do you think it’s a good idea to remove advertising from public spaces? Why/Why not?
8. Johan Norberg said that carbon dioxide emissions dropped by no more than 6% in 2020. Before he revealed that number, would you have guessed that emissions dropped by more or less than 6%? Are you surprised by the amount that they dropped? Why/Why not?

9. Jason Hickel suggested we reduce “unnecessary production.” If such a policy were adopted, who would determine what production is “unnecessary”? How would it be decided?
10. Johan Norberg said: “In fact, the risk of dying in a climate-related disaster—floods, drought, storms, and extreme heat—has been reduced by some 95% since the 1950s.” What caused this reduction? Were you surprised to learn this? Why isn’t more highly publicized?
11. Jason Hickel suggested a federal jobs guarantee with living wages. Do you think this idea is compatible with the reduction of production, advertising, and consumption? Why/Why not?
12. Johan Norberg asked: “What do we need when something is too expensive?” How did he answer this question?
13. Jason Hickel said that most people see very little benefit from economic growth. Has the average person benefited from economic growth over the past century? If so, how? Do you think the benefits have been significant? Why/Why not?
14. Johan Norberg used the term “purchasing power.” What is purchasing power? How does this measurement differ from income?
15. Jason Hickel said: “Justice is the antidote to growth.” What did he mean by this?
16. According to Johan Norberg, the Environment Performance of Yale University concluded that environmental performance correlates strongly with a country’s wealth. Why is this?
17. Should one of the arguments we heard carry more weight than the other? If so, which one? Why?
18. Did you have an opinion on this topic before watching these videos? If so, what was it? Has your opinion changed? If so, how? What did you learn from either video that affects your views of this topic?
19. What could you learn about this topic that might affect your view of this debate?
20. What else would you like to learn about this topic?
21. For more on this topic, check out these other entries in our Both Sides of the Issue series:
 - a. [Both Sides: Can Socialism Save the Environment?](#)
 - b. [Both Sides: Climate Change vs. Economic Growth](#)