Module 8 Assignment

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The two important conflicting ideas I am focused on are capitalism versus environmental sustainability (a habitable earth).

An important problem that exists because of one conflict between capitalist societies and environmental sustainability is the role consumerism, a key component of capitalism, plays on harming our natural resources.

I would begin by making this introductory comment on this conflict. The basis of capitalism is the pursuit of profit and requires consumption of goods. The production of these goods people want to consume requires natural resources, which 200 years ago may have seemed endless, but today are becoming critically depleted. In addition, when these products are made and then discarded of, there is pollution, energy use, and garbage that are poisoning our environment. The exploitation of our natural resources to satiate the demands of those of us living in capitalist societies is driving species to extinction, destroying our eco-systems, and leading to an uninhabitable planet.

In other words, our greed is killing our selves.

For example, last night I was watching the final NCAA basketball match. I don’t often watch regular TV, so it was fascinating to see some of the commercials. I was struck by all the car/truck commercials and the flashy new must-haves, including hybrid and electric vehicles. I wondered how many people actually need a new vehicle. How many people just want what is new, cool, and flashy? They trade-in their 5-year-old vehicle for the latest. What natural resources were required to build their older car? What natural resources are required for this one? What would happen to our US economy and the world economy if everyone stopped buying new cars unless they really, truly needed one? Well, our economy, including many people’s livelihoods, would be in shambles. But, what would happen to our environment when we weren’t mining for lithium, cobalt, manganese, nickel, and graphite for new electric batteries, and we weren’t polluting areas near steel plants, and automobile factories?

To illustrate, if we just think about our own bodies, we can spend a few hours or days overusing our bodies (maybe partying, overeating, or overexercising) – but it isn’t sustainable. We will make ourselves sick, injured, or die if we don’t stop. We must sleep, eat healthy foods and fluids and heal wounds to find balance. We can’t just make demands on our bodies, we must live in balance.

One reasonable objection to my positions is as follows. Others may argue that humans will figure out how to keep earth habitable. With capitalism, there will be people/corporations who will figure out how to capitalize on new kinds of goods and products as we see dwindling natural resources. They will use ingenuity to create products we can consume that won’t require depleting our natural resources. We will figure out how to deal with garbage, pollution, micro-plastics, climate, etc.. In the meantime, they would say, we can’t do anything too dramatic in favor of protecting our natural resources as doing so would negatively impact our economy and personal lifestyles in the short-term.

I certainly do hope that because of capitalism we can change direction of how we are impacting the environment. Sorry that I don’t have much if any hope in that, though. Most of us aren’t willing to give up our comforts in the short-term for the long-term gains. And, the major changes we need to have happen NOW would require government intervention. We know that our government is controlled by people and corporations who have greatly benefitted from our capitalistic system.