Affirmative Case: Human Well-Being

The US is an economic superpower that exports services and products all over the world. But we weren’t always so rich. We had to industrialize just like everyone else. This country is built on oil, timber, and precious metals, as well as the largest coal reserve in the world. Those industries are not great for spotted owls, but they’re great for humans—and that’s what really matters. I’m resolved: Developing countries ought to prioritize economic growth over environmental protection.

Let’s start with a

# Value: Human Well-Being

Human Well-Being is operationally defined as: “The overall health, happiness, and prosperity of people – as opposed to that of concepts, things, or animals.”

Here’s why this is the best way to measure the resolution.

## Value Link 1: Only Ethical End

At the end of every choice, there are distracting factors like money or culture or community or progress. None of those are true end goals. The only thing we can ethically consider an end goal is the well-being of people. People are autonomous, unique, sacred individuals. They have intrinsic worth, so we must do what’s best for humans above anything else.

## Value Link 1: Robust Measure

With a resolution this broad, there are many factors for you to consider in making your decision. Human well-being matches the resolution by giving you flexibility when making your decision. Put another way: everything that should matter to developing countries is part of this value, and vice versa.

# Contention 1: Economic Growth promotes Human Well-Being

Economic growth isn’t always pretty. Drilling, mining, and forestry are critical tools a country uses to develop out of poverty. But it’s well worth it, because the result is tremendous quality of life for citizens.

## Application: United States

America led the industrial revolution with factories and innovation, and then kept right on going. Human well-being flourished on the foundation of manufacturing combined with using our natural resources like coal, oil, and timber. Now we’ve reached tremendous economic success: we have the second-largest economy in the world, according to the CIA World Factbook.[[1]](#footnote-2)

But, that has come at the cost of the environment. Corey Bradshaw is the Environment Institute’s Director of Ecological Modeling. In 2010, he published a report in the peer-reviewed scientific journal PLOS ONE. The report ranked the United States the 2nd-biggest polluter in the world.[[2]](#footnote-3)

So we’re rich but smoggy. How is that paying off?

In 2014, the UN released the Human Development Report, a 124-page document that evaluated every country in the world based on dozens of factors like life expectancy and education. In that report, the US was ranked 5th-best in the world. The only countries that beat us were Australia and three small, wealthy European countries – which are all, in their own ways, success stories for economic growth.[[3]](#footnote-4)

To summarize: we have the 2nd best economy, the 2nd worst environment, and we’re thriving.

We need to be careful to avoid the hypocrisy of telling other countries: “You don’t get to be wealthy like us.” They’re more than just tourist destinations. They’re countries full of people who deserve a shot at a great life.

# Contention 2: Environmental Protection hinders Human Well-Being

Sure, it’s nice to have pristine secluded beaches and wildlife preserves, but the well-being of humans needs to come first. Developing countries are struggling with issues like malnutrition and lack of access to healthcare and education. They need to confront those pressing issues, and while they do, it’s okay to leave the trees unhugged and the whales unsaved.

## Application: Swaziland

Remember Corey Bradshaw from the Environment Institute? His study also revealed the most environmentally-friendly countries in the world. The top five are little islands like St. Lucia in the Caribbean. The first real entry is the southern-African nation of Swaziland. Swaziland stands as a shining beacon of environmental protection.[[4]](#footnote-5)

The Swaziland Environment Authority works tirelessly to protect its place as the least polluting continental nation in the world through monitoring, community outreach, and of course, stringent regulations. The Environmental Management Act of 2002 gave the SEA carte-blanche to intervene in the lives and businesses of Swazis, fining or imprisoning anyone who pollutes too much.[[5]](#footnote-6)

Again, these measures worked as intended. Swaziland’s environment is pristine. The national bird, the purple-crested turaco, is alive and well. On the other hand, the humans in Swaziland aren’t doing well, with two-thirds of the population in poverty.[[6]](#footnote-7)

BBC ran an article in 2011 titled “Swaziland: A Kingdom in Crisis.” It reported that disease is rampant, the government is near bankruptcy, people providing critical public services are trying to get by on half salaries, and 15-year-olds are the heads of their own households. The Human Development Index gave Swaziland the abysmal rating of Low. It came in at 148th in the world.[[7]](#footnote-8)

The biggest tragedy: all this suffering is avoidable. Swaziland has an abundance of natural resources, including gold, diamonds, coal, hydropower, and timber.[[8]](#footnote-9) They could leap out of poverty if they would just affirm the resolution.

We’ve looked at two countries today. One doesn’t uphold the resolution, and keeps its people in desperate suffering. The other does, and enjoys one of the highest levels of human well-being in the world. I hope you’ll vote for the American way. Thank you.

1. The World Factbook, “Country Comparison: GDP (Purchasing Power Parity),” Central Intelligence Agency, 2014. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/rankorder/2001rank.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Bradshaw CJA, Giam X, Sodhi NS (2010) “Evaluating the Relative Environmental Impact of Countries.” PLoS ONE 5(5): e10440. <http://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0010440> The biggest polluter in the world is Brazil. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. “Human Development Report,” United Nations Human Development Project, 2014. <http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/hdr14-report-en-1.pdf> The top countries are Norway (94%), Australia (93%), Switzerland and Netherlands (91%(. The last two lead the USA (91%) by fractions of a percent. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. See footnote 2 for source. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. “The Environment Managament Bill, 1999” Swaziland Government Authority, 2002. Accessed December 11, 2015. <http://www.environment.gov.sz/files/em_act.pdf> Listed on the official SEA website under a hyperlink labelled: “The Environmental Management Act of 2002.” <http://www.environment.gov.sz/> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. The World Factbook, “Swaziland,” Central Intelligence Agency, 2014. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/wz.html> “Population below poverty line: 69%” [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. See footnote 3 for source. Swaziland has a rating of 53%. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. The World Factbook, “Field Listing: Natural Resources,” Central Intelligence Agency, 2014. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/fields/2111.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-9)