

Rainforests Analysis:

Summarize, Analyze and Critique the following article. Then compare to the model answer below:

Brazil is one of the few countries that possess precious rainforests. It is also a poor country relying on the destruction of the rainforest to supply much of its income.

Brazilians use the rainforest to make products to fuel industrialized nations' craving for comfortable living and "all natural" products.

What we need to do in industrialized nations is raise tariffs drastically on rainforest products not only from Brazil, but also from all countries that destroy rainforests. The entire world needs to recognize the rapid dwindling of this precious ecosystem, and tariffs are the tool to give a wake-up call to these equatorial countries. Tariffs would make it cost more to produce and sell rainforest products and ultimately make it less and less attractive to do business in these ecosystems.

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Conclusion: Raise tariffs drastically on rainforest products.

Reason: This will help the world see the “rapid dwindling of this precious ecosystem.”

Reason: Tariffs will make it cost more to produce rainforest products, resulting in less production, thus reducing the destruction of the rainforest.

(Assumption: this predicted result will actually occur this way)

(Assumption: doing this won't cause some other problem)

Ambiguous terms:

- “raise tariffs drastically” (how much should we raise tariffs? Is that realistic?)
- “rapid dwindling” (how rapid? And is it)
- “cost more” to do business (How much more?)
- “precious economic” What are the consequences of reducing the rainforests?

(Whenever the reader fails to examine the ambiguous terms, he is assuming they are meant the way he interprets them. When the writer uses critically ambiguous terms, he may be incompetently assuming they communicate clearly his meaning, or he may be dishonestly using ambiguity to hide the real objections to his argument.)

What is valued here?

- Precious rainforests
- Ecology

What values are in conflict?

- Comfortable living (cheap products) for us vs. precious rainforests
- Poor country's income vs. precious rainforests

What value is assumed?

- Ecological health in nature over economic health of people (Ecology over economy)

Descriptive Assumptions to question:

- The writer has some economic expertise to support his/her predictions.
- There will be no negative consequences to this policy.
- The Brazilian economy, and those of other equatorial countries, won't be harmed if this writer's argument became law.
- The amount of the tariff will be sufficient to reduce importing of products to effect the cutting of the rainforests.
- There are other ways the poor will now make a living [or else the poor of Brazil don't seem to matter].

The writer of “Rainforests” claims (a) that we should raise import tariffs “drastically” on consumer products from the Brazilian rainforests, in order to (b) make products cost more and thus (c) reduce American consumption, thereby (d) reduce destruction of the “precious resource” of those rainforests.

This chain of cause-effect reasoning is weak because (1) the writer ambiguously fails to recommend a specific amount to raise tariffs, how much production will be reduced, and for what the “precious rainforest”

will be saved. (2) He also **assumes** that there will be no **negative consequences** to his recommendation, even if it proves to work: what will the poor peasants do to survive when they lose their means of livelihood? He does not suggest an alternative way for the poor to make a living. What will be the effect on the national economy? (3) He certainly **values** the ecology of the rainforests for the world's climate, but that is over any value for basic human needs for employment and food. (4) He assumes that the rainforests can only be cut down in a non-sustainable way in order to provide cheap products to Americans. (5) Finally, he **offers no credible evidence** in support of the need or effectiveness of his recommendation, and I am not willing to assume that he has any expertise to back up his risky recommendation. It is a simplistic solution that does not account for the complexities of scientific and economic consequences.