



## Walking the walk

Posted by [Yankee](#) on July 6, 2005 - 12:05am

Dave Roberts has an interesting post at [Gristmill](#) called "[There are worse things than hypocrisy](#)". It's a response to a reader who sends the question:

In a [recent column](#), George Monbiot excoriates environmental superstars for not walking the talk. So what about the *Grist* luminaries? How do you live in reality?

I have long thought that for most people, the goal of conservation should be to *cut down* on the quantity of waste one produces, or the amount of fuel or electricity one consumes. The goal is not to become the most virtuous environmentalist/survivalist, living in a cabin without electricity and sustaining oneself off the garden in the back. Instead, the idea is to figure out how to sustain modern lifestyles that have been developed over decades while eliminating the unnecessary excesses.

Imagine how much we would cut down on if we all just refused the plastic bags or cut out meat even 2 days a week.

While I think Roberts is right to disdain the claim of hypocrisy, I don't entirely agree with his response. At the end of the piece, he writes:

Whether I, or you, or any *particular* person lives a life of environmental virtue is all-but-irrelevant to the larger environmental effort. The goal is creating a human society where a life of environmental virtue is *de facto*, something individuals live without thinking twice about it, because their material and social circumstances channel them in that direction.

Yes, of course the point is to change the social forces in a more sustainable and environmentally friendly direction. But I don't think that people publicly advocating such cultural change can afford to make *no* changes in their lives. I think the best course of action is to make small but obvious changes--the canvas bags at the grocery store, living closer to work, consolidating the errands to cut down on car trips--to demonstrate to other people that we can still enjoy modern conveniences while drastically cutting down our abuses of them.

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