Question 2

The two passages below, both written by noted contemporary scientist Edward O. Wilson, appear in Wilson’s book The Future of Life (2002). In the passages, Wilson satirizes the language of two groups that hold opposing attitudes about environmentalism. Read each passage carefully. Then write an essay in which you analyze how Wilson’s satire illustrates the unproductive nature of such discussions.

THE PEOPLE-FIRST CRITIC STEREOTYPES THE ENVIRONMENTALISTS

Environmentalists or conservationists is what they usually call themselves. Depending on how angry we are, we call them greens, enviros, environmental extremists, or environmental wackos. Mark my word, conservation pushed by these people always goes too far, because it is an instrument for gaining political power. The wackos have a broad and mostly hidden agenda that always comes from the left, usually far left. How to get power? is what they’re thinking.

Their aim is to expand government, especially the federal government. They want environmental laws and regulatory surveillance to create government-supported jobs for their kind of bureaucrats, lawyers, and consultants. The New Class, these professionals have been called. What’s at stake as they busy themselves are your tax dollars and mine, and ultimately our freedom too. Relax your guard when these people are in power and your property rights go down the tube. Some Bennington College student with a summer job will find an endangered red spider on your property, and before you know what happened the Endangered Species Act will be used to shut you down. Can’t sell to a developer, can’t even harvest your woodlot. Business investors can’t get at the oil and gas on federal lands this country badly needs. Mind you, I’m all for the environment, and I agree that species extinction is a bad thing, but conservation should be kept in perspective. It is best put in private hands. Property owners know what’s good for their own land. They care about the plants and animals living there. Let them work out conservation. They are the real grass roots in this country. Let them be the stewards and handle conservation. A strong, growing free-market economy, not creeping socialism, is what’s best for America—and it’s best for the environment too.

THE ENVIRONMENTALIST STEREOTYPES THE PEOPLE-FIRST CRITICS

“Critics” of the environmental movement? That may be what they call themselves, but we know them more accurately as anti-environmentalists and brown lashers or, more locally out west, wise users (their own term, not intended to be ironic) and sagebrush rebels. In claiming concern of any kind for the natural environment, these people are the worst bunch of hypocrites you’ll ever not want to find. What they are really after, especially the corporate heads and big-time landowners, is unrestrained capitalism with land development über alles.* They keep their right-wing political agenda mostly hidden when downgrading climate change and species extinction, but for them economic growth is always the ultimate, and maybe the only, good. Their idea of conservation is stocking trout streams and planting trees around golf courses. Their conception of the public trust is a strong military establishment and subsidies for loggers and ranchers. The anti-environmentalists would be laughed out of court if they weren’t tied so closely to the corporate power structure. And notice how rarely international policy makers pay attention to the environment. At the big conferences of the World Trade Organization and other such gatherings of the rich and powerful, conservation almost never gets so much as a hearing. The only recourse we have is to protest at their meetings. We hope to attract the attention of the media and at least get our unelected rulers to look out the window. In America the right-wingers have made the word “conservative” a mockery. What exactly are they trying to conserve? Their own selfish interests, for sure, not the natural environment.

* German for “above everything else”
Sample C

In Edward O. Wilson's book, *The Future of Life*, he satirizes the unproductive nature of opposing environmentalist attitudes. Wilson does this effectively by using diction and examples. The audience knows right off the bat that Wilson is using satire by his diction in the first lines of his passage. By stating "environmentalists or conservationists is what they usually call themselves" let the audience know that Wilson doesn't respect them as being such. Also, in the beginning lines of the second passage Wilson puts the word "critics" in quotes. This also shows that Wilson does not accept the opinions of the anti-environmentalists who he describes as "the worst bunch of hypocrites." Wilson states that they are unproductive because they have a hidden agenda that is set in place only to get them power. Wilson acknowledges the fact that if anti-environmentalists were not so powerful in the cooperative structure that they "would be laughed out of court."

Wilson notes the unproductivity of the opposing attitudes by giving examples of how their accomplishments have affected people. He tells of one hypothetical example where if an endangered species is found on a person's property, then that property will be shut down doing no good to the owner and probably not improving the species of the Red Spider much. Wilson also writes that environmentalists keep the government from drilling the oil that "this country badly needs". This is unproductive because Americans now have to spend enormous amounts of money to fill up their gas tanks which leaves less money for them to donate to other charitable causes that many improve the environment.

All in all, the works of the environmentalists and anti-environmentalists is unproductive. Wilson effectively illustrates this in his satirical piece by using diction and details. If these parties went less extreme they may have a good chance of changing the world as they see fit.

Sample W

In his two passages satirizing the language of the "Environmentalists" and the "Conservatives", Edward Wilson is successfully able to employ satire to convey the hypocritical and unproductive nature of the arguments. Through this satire, Wilson is able to clearly illustrate the flaws and generalizations of the two opposing groups.

Most strikingly, both passages follow the same structure; "What they call themselves", "what power" they want, examples of their "foolishness", and ending with their beliefs compared to the beliefs of the latter. The satire is evident because each group rants about the other being completely different than themselves, yet the passages are almost identical, which bring out the hypocritical aspect as well, ultimately illustrating the uselessness of the discussion.

The passages start off by spitting out derogatory names of the opposing party. "Call themselves" is in both selections, but in the end, Isn't it what the opposing faction calls them? I'm sure the environmentalists don't call themselves "wackos" nor do the critics call themselves "brown lashers". Then the passages go on to state what the opposition wants. In both cases, each is "suspected" of wanting "power", more specifically, "expanded and unrestrained government". So far each passage has been able to describe themselves basically, which further illustrates that the parties are unproductively arguing semantics.

Next, the passages make unsupported claims suggesting what the opposition would do if they were in control. The conservatives claim the environmentalists will take away property, while the environmentalists claim the conservatives will establish military power and develop land "above everything else". Both claims are absurd hyperboles capable of establishing nothing but non-sourced claims and generalizations, which are ever-present in both documents as well. The left generalizes the right and the right stereotypes the left, in each case stating their "true" and "innocent" opinions, "What ... trying to conserve? Their own selfish interests ...not the natural environment" and "A strong market economy, not creeping socialism, is what's best for America. - and best for the environment too."

Skillfully employing satire, Mr. Wilson is able to paint a picture of the unproductive nature of hypocritical and generalizing groups that are environmentalists and conservatives. Through this satire, one can only come to the conclusion that each group are hypocrites and are simply arguing semantics.
Discussions between parties with two extremely differing point of views can get more than a little out of hand. They end up not so much discussions as arguments, each name calling and stereotyping the other. In his book The Future of Life, Edward O. Wilson uses satire to mock opposing sides on the issue of environmentalism to discredit the arguments of both movements.

Wilson uses insulting diction to make both parties seem juvenile and unprofessional. The people first critics call the environmentalists “wackos” and “extremists” while the environmentalists consider the people-first critics “brown lashers” and “rebels.” It is unacceptable to name-call in professional writing. By having the sides exchange insults, Wilson makes them seem not only unprofessional, but rude and spiteful. It mocks the argument of both sides because those are the actual terms they use in their discussions. The name calling is symbolic of how unproductive those kinds of discussions are because people without respect for one another will not cooperate together. The disagreement causes a lack of respect and the lack of respect only perpetuates the problem. The discussion between the parties is useless because the opponents cannot put their differences aside long enough to decide on a solution.

The author uses an absurd specific example to illustrate the unrealistic viewpoints of both parties. The People-First critic speculates on the possibility of a “college student” finding an “endangered red spider” on someone’s property, then using the Endangered species Act to freeze the person’s assets. This fear is absurd enough that the reader laughs at the People-First critic for being afraid that it might happen. Then, the environmentalists are portrayed as crazy enough to attempt to seize someone’s property for a spider on the word of a college student and the reader questions the environmentalist’s judgement. Both side’s authority and argument are discredited with Wilson’s examples: the critics for their absurd fear and the environmentalists for their absurd actions. Discussions between two absurdly out of touch people will never lead to a rational compromise, and so they are useless and unproductive.

Wilson uses parallelism to show how the critics and environmentalists are two sides of the same coin. Both passages play the blame game, saying “They want environmental laws” or “They keep their right-wing political agenda mostly hidden.” The passages use the same accusatory tone mocking the way they viciously point out the “flaws” in the other person. This only makes them seem obstinate and juvenile. Instead of trying to empathize with the values and ideas of their opponents, they attempt to sue the other’s beliefs as faults. The sidles both reject whatever “they” believe without even considering its merit. The outright refusal to empathize illustrates the futile unproductiveness of discussions between extremists. Both sides believe they are right, and everyone else is wrong. If it were possible to switch the beliefs of an environmentalist to that of a critic’s nothing would change because their attitude toward each other is the same. They refuse rationality and prefer pointless arguments to reasonable discussions that might sacrifice some things, but would gain results.

An argument between two extremists is an endless one. No progress towards a solution can be made because neither side is willing to sacrifice anything. Edward Wilson’s use of satire convinces the audience of the absurdity of the views of people unwilling to compromise. He mocks their extremem bids and emphasizes the futility of them fighting. Progress can never be made without sacrifices.