'[T]he north should be held entirely responsible for both environment degradation and its clear up'.

Roy marked this one and I agreed with his mark of 71%. His comments were as follows: Very clear and well presented. BUT wildly one-sided in the denial of any agency emerging from the South. P.10 you say agreements should not be imposed. How should deforestation be halted in Brazil, S.E. Asia Solomons +? There is an argument about external debt but can the govt + people of the South be absolved of ALL responsibility? This is a very convincing argument but verges on the polemic.

So, I guess the lesson here is, no matter how good your argument, at least pay lip service to the opposition. 'Sally' got 77% for her dissertation, which was judged of publishable standard by our external, so it's not as if 71% represents the best she could have done. Still, looking at the bibliography you'll see she clearly put in the effort! An example to follow...Lloyd

The degradation of the environment is a global problem and has been recognised as such for a decade at least. Although the idea that 'common but differentiated responsibilities' is becoming acceptable within global environmental agreements, responsibility for both the environmental degradation and its 'clear up' remains in contention. This disputation is focussed on the North/South divide between wealthy and poor countries as identified by the Brandt Report in 1980.² The division is an oversimplification and misleading, as there are pockets of extreme poverty within the wealthy countries of the North and rich enclaves within vast poverty in the poorer countries of the South. It is, however, entirely due to the hegemonic practices of the powerful in the wealthier countries that the elite minorities can be sustained in the poorer countries.³ So, for the purposes of this essay the North/South over simplification will be overlooked in the division of responsibility for environmental degradation.

Although it is necessary for all countries of the world to adopt, or transfer to, environmentally friendly practices to prevent further degradation and preserve the world in a habitable condition if future generations are to survive, the essay will argue that the wealthier industrialized countries of the 'North' should be held entirely responsible for both the degradation of the environment and the entire cost of its 'clear up'. This is because, the essay will argue, the countries of the North are not only mainly responsible for the declining condition of the environment but they are also, directly or indirectly, responsible for the extreme and debilitating poverty prevalent in the poorer countries of the South.⁴

The wealthier countries of the 'North' have grown rich by industrializing and polluting the environment; beginning in previous centuries and financed by the exploitation of the poorer countries of the 'South' through colonization. As Gandhi has said, the wealth of countries like Britain was based on the 'systematic plunder of half the world's resources'. Moreover, Davidson asserts that, since decolonisation, economic domination has replaced political control. Disempowerment inevitably causes dependency. Colonial regimes created the dependency and following the imperialist example the post-independent regimes, in collusion with business interests and international development agencies, controlled by the North, have continued to reduced land, people and their environment to expendable resources for the global economy.

In the 1930s under colonialism in Africa, land was seized from farmers and sold to white settlers to grow cash crops for export, while the indigenous people were forced from their land and out of rural life. They could no longer produce their own food and were made to work for the colonialists. Before colonization, the original divisions of land and nation had fed their people comparatively well and internal trade in farm produce had flourished.⁸ However, colonization, and poor land management, since, due to the effects

of disempowerment, have depleted resources. Forests have been destroyed, grasslands damaged and soil erosion and desertification has occurred. Meanwhile, continuing the disregard for indigenous people, their culture and their environment, the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) recommended the production of cash crops as recently as 1991. The most productive land was set aide for intensive agriculture production while the indigenous population was transmigrated to marginal lands.

Sachs asserts, development, as defined by the dominant cultures of the northern hemisphere (the inevitability of progress defined as more), was considered to be the solution to the newly discovered problem of poverty in the 1950s and the 'conceptual vehicle' that enabled the USA to appear to spearhead the drive for national self-determination while covertly founding its own form of world domination: economic imperialism. This perception of poverty ignored quality of life and the environment as '[e]conomic distain' replaced 'colonial contempt.' There was pressure to 'develop' from the industrialized countries of the North and this entailed a reorientation of culture and society as, according to Sachs, 'ideals and mental habits, patterns of work and modes of knowing, webs of loyalties and rules of governance in which the South's people were steeped' were considered to be obstacles to economic growth. Centuries of evolving civilization, already halted, disallowed and discounted by colonialism were inhibited still further by the drive for development imposed by the North.

Traditionally, and according to the model of the industrialized North, development is evaluated through economic growth and poverty is defined by purchasing power as income per capita. Liberal and now realist theorists, through the neo-neo synthesis, in international relations, contend that economies can and should be stimulated from above

or 'top down', and 'trickle down' will eventually improve the lives of the poorest.¹³ This has patently not been successful as the gap between rich and poor countries has considerably widened and excessive reliance on foreign advice from agencies with no knowledge of the real situation has led to the debt crisis.¹⁴ Alternative critical theories have evolved with the recognition that economic growth will only improve living standards when accompanied by social and environmental considerations.

The critical view of development prioritises the well being of the individual within a sustainable and conducive natural environment and concerns material and non-material needs. Development can be stimulated by and within local communities 'bottom up' and encourages self-reliance in human, natural or cultural resource and should aim to be sustainable. ¹⁵ Critics of the orthodox view contend that the cost to the environment has not been considered and is still not adequately taken into account in mainstream political thought imposed upon developing countries by dominant discourse. Although ecological concerns are now on mainstream agendas they are still sacrificed for economic growth.

Meyer suggests that traditional IR theory ignores and abuses nature, ¹⁶ and according to Hovden, western (for western read Northern for the purposes of the essay) orientated dominant thought in International Relations (IR) theory does not adequately consider the environment and needs re-orientating accordingly, ¹⁷ Moreover, Ball asserts that the sustainable development is not a new idea and originates with Kant, Burke and Jefferson. ¹⁸ Collins-Chobanian reminds us that without clean air, clean water and fertile soil, humans will not survive and environmental rights should be our most basic rights. ¹⁹ Preston argues that postmodern epistemologies can deal more adequately with environmental issues through 'a contextualized ethical discourse' which avoids

universalist dominated metanarratives or foundational claims.²⁰ Haywood insists that political theory should be very aware of the interaction and interdependency of human interests and ecological considerations.²¹ This failure to address environmental issues in orthodox academia is reflected in mainstream politics in the real world.

At the United Nations Conference on the Environment and Development, the Brundtland Commission, sustainable development was defined thus: 'meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'²², and involves devising strategies to 'stimulate economic and social development without over-exploitation, pollution or environmental degradation'.²³ Opinions vary on how to achieve sustainable development although present policies incur over-fishing of oceans and seas, while land is rendered unsuitable for agriculture due to soil erosion and desertification. The ecosystem is not considered as natural habitats are destroyed. Over fifty percent of tropical rainforests have disappeared and continue to do so.²⁴ Claims are made that only one fifth of the world's original forests remain and consumption is rising mainly due to the North's monopolization of trade. In spite of this the leaders of the G7 countries continue to promote free trade.²⁵

The North, through the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, promised the poorer countries debt relief and more funds if they adopted Structural Adjustment Programmes and developing countries have been coerced into opening their own markets to world trade without reciprocation from the North.²⁶ Despite growing evidence that current patterns of international trade disadvantage developing countries and persist in damaging the environment, economics continue to be prioritised in the World Trade Organization (WTO).²⁷ The economies of the North and the economies of the South are

further apart than ever before as the income gap widens and poverty increases. Having exploited the cheap raw materials and inexpensive labour force of the countries of the South, the technologicalized economies of the North are now able to substitute these with ease and now prosper on the exclusion of the South. No longer needed as countries to exploit the South are now relegated to zones of risk and in the media in the countries of the North economic immigrants from the South are viewed suspiciously as the 'Other'.²⁸

Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) press for monitoring how policies affect the poor with the focus on sustainable development.²⁹ However corporate activism, based in the North, counters the efforts of environmentalists as belief structures in a world where all we think see and believe are influenced by powerful interests who manipulate those with control in governments in the North.³⁰ At the Climate Convention in 1995, the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) advocated twenty percent reductions in developed country's emissions by 2010. Reaction among developed countries was muted. The EU agreed to a five to ten percent decrease by 2010 but Japan, the US, Australia and Canada were reluctant to commit themselves with obligation from developing countries as well. It seems that the interests of the wealthy in industrialized countries will always be put first.³¹

However in Kyoto in 1997, there was a specific responsibility recognised by developed countries of the North without obligation from the developing countries of the South. Nevertheless the US was reluctant to commit themselves to anything which might threaten their prosperity and Climate Change talks broke down at The Hague earlier this year. ³² The new Bush Administration has very recently refused to ratify the Kyoto agreement. Moreover, when the North was more affected by environmental degradation

than the South through ozone depletion, the industrialized countries were very quick to insist on global participation and only too prepared to allow concessions to the developing countries of the south.³³ When the interests of the North are threatened by environmental degradation there is a rapid reaction. When the South is threatened the response is slow. The North is little interested in problems of desertification and soil erosion in the South because they are not directly affected.³⁴ However, the North should be aware that the whole world is under threat from climate change. Not only are countries like Bangladesh at risk of flooding and small low lying island states in jeopardy as the sea level rises but all major cities on coastal regions in the developed world will be in peril if measures to reduce fossil fuel emissions are not taken. Nuclear and fossil fuels could be phased out by 2010. Political will is all that is needed because the technology and the economics are feasible.³⁵

Meanwhile, reports from the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) confirm that it is already too late to prevent climate change and temperature rises in the coming decades. 'Wasteful consumers in rich countries' have contributed to failure to achieve reduction targets agreed at Kyoto and the US is largely to blame. Twenty per cent of the global population are already denied access to clean water and the situation will deteriorate. The destruction of natural resources, the ecosystem, needed to sustain human life will result in armed conflict over supplies of fresh water.³⁶ Meanwhile in Britain, corrupt multi-national corporations continue to cause ecological destruction through pollution because it is cheaper to pay fines than to pay for the technology to prevent pollution.³⁷

It is vital for all people in the world and the governments of all countries to recognise the seriousness of the threat to the environment if production methods and life-styles continue unabated and abuse the ecosystem to destruction. And if the South uses energy to develop in the same way as that North has done, the future will be dominated by climate change, toxic waste and air pollution. A discourse based on equality and sustainability is essential to encourage cooperation between all countries of the North and the South. 38 But the North should recognise their responsibility and finance the necessary measures worldwide. Wall, Isaak and Porteous assert that the solution is to educate people, empower them with knowledge of the environment and counter the dominant discourse which encourages complacency in the interests of profit. It is important to advocate quality of life over acquisition of goods and equilibrium between production, consumption, people and resources, while respecting diversity of social groups.³⁹ However, Schmidt argues that however important the environment is to people, they will act conversely to their beliefs if they cannot afford to be 'green'. In other words their immediate needs are prioritised over the environment. Schmidt recommends environmental conflict resolution, negotiation and compromise and asserts that developing countries will only be able to consider environmental issues when the immediate needs of their people are met. 'For many of the world's people today, nature ... comes in the night to kill their children. 40

DeSombre reminds us that the majority of the world's population live within states that are designated developing by the UN and they do have concerns regarding environmental issues and are prepared to act upon them if it were financially possible. She also asserts that contrary to the attempts to influence the global economic order which failed in the 1970s, G77, have had more success in environmental negotiations and have secured

agreements favourable to their disadvantaged situations. The South has won concessions entailing financial help and more time to implement measures to protect the environment, while some developing countries have received debt relief in exchange for protecting their biodiversity. Most significantly, it is agreed that aid as development assistance is to be distributed by a decision making body consisting of both recipient and donor countries.⁴¹

Meanwhile Stoett and Laferriere comment that even after Rio in 1992, the environment is rarely considered an important electoral issue, and environmental policies are implemented unsystematically and inefficiently in both Northern and Southern states. Similarly, in political science there is still a gap between environmental issues and traditional IR in spite of the post Cold War 'one world'. However, where governments do consider the destruction of the environment, the pollution of the sea, ozone depletion and climate change, there is a reluctance to recognise responsibility. Post World War Two the US aid budget was three per cent of GDP. Now, however the budget has been reduced to a quarter of a per cent of GDP while military spending consumes a massive seven per cent. Developing countries favour the creation of now institutions to deal with global environmental problems. This would be beneficial as the existing institutions are pervaded with the dominant discourse and values of the North. The South would appreciate acknowledgement from the North concerning the majority of responsibility in the destruction of the environment, and accept financial and technical assistance on a basis of mutual respect and recognition. It is in the interests of the North to comply.

In conclusion, this essay has argued that the wealthier industrialized countries of the 'North' should be held entirely responsible for both the degradation of the

environment and the entire cost of its 'clear up'. Colonization facilitated the exploitation of land and indigenous people by the industrialized Europeans. Following de-colonization, exploitation continued through global economic domination by the US. Consequently, the wealthier industrialized countries of the North are responsible for the extreme and debilitating poverty prevalent in the poorer countries of the South. ⁴⁶ It is incumbent on the North, therefore, to not only do all they are able in their own hemisphere to conserve the global environment but, to assist in any way they can, financially (in the form of donations not loans) or practically with knowledge transference, manpower and appropriate intermediate technology, the poorer countries of the South to do the same, if that is what they wish.

Although it is necessary for all countries of the world to implement environmentally friendly practices to prevent further degradation and preserve the world in a habitable condition if future generations are to survive, it is important that all countries are agreeable to these measures and regulations are not imposed upon the poorer countries of the South as has occurred in the past. Some consideration is being given to their disadvantaged circumstances in environmental negotiations,⁴⁷ but more should and could be done to rectify the wrongs of the past, due to a history of exploitation and domination by the North, in assisting the South to adjust to environmentally friendly modes of production. The developing countries are as concerned as the wealthier countries of the North about the declining condition of their environment and the adverse consequences but cannot afford to take the appropriate measures.⁴⁸

The North is responsible for the widespread poverty in the South and the majority of the environmental degradation so the North should fund the necessary institutions and whatever measures required, in the North and the South, to conserve the environment.

The assault on the natural environment by the culture of urban industrialization without consideration of the damaging consequences for the ecosystem as a whole is tragic, and for humanity, if the appropriate measures are not taken, a terminal disease. As Porteous says: 'from creation to apocalypse', the world will come to an end not with a nuclear holocaust 'but with the long-drawn-out whimper of ecocatastrophe.'

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