

## Vinyl 2010 Essay Competition Submission Template

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### **Summary:**

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International links need to be strengthened in every time of crisis, and the coming energy and food crises are no different. Protectionism may seem like the best option for some countries, but the reality is that without cooperation, no country will be able to withstand the challenges facing us. As such, firm action will have to be taken to curb rising population levels, and every person will have to understand that unnecessary comforts will have to be sacrificed to ensure a peaceful future.

### **Essay:**

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The concept of society's well-being is a very troublesome one. In an increasingly globalised world, we are perhaps closer to having a single international society than at any point in the past. Nevertheless, states remain more concerned with their own citizens' well-being than with helping those in other countries. This is understandable, being the underlying principle of the state system that has dominated international affairs for the past few centuries. However, it should be remembered that the protection of the physical or ideological "well-being" of a nation's people from an alien threat, real or perceived, has been the underlying motive behind most major conflicts of recent years.

However, today's problems cannot easily be laid at the doors of a single nation – or indeed solved by one nation alone. While this makes the tackling of these problems considerably more difficult, it also provides us with a valuable opportunity to promote international inclusion and cooperation. Nations should be encouraged to put the collective well-being of the world's people ahead of individual interests. Unless cooperation is expanded and encouraged over the next few years, wars may once more be fought over natural resources, especially oil and water. Climate change will damage water supplies and consequently food production, while our efforts to reduce fossil fuel use are making even more urgent the need for alternative forms of energy.

The irony of our situation today is that we are victims of our own success. Internationally, over the past century, death and infant mortality rates have plummeted, as cheap energy and advances in medicine and other technologies have boosted both the number of people surviving infancy and the length of time they live for. The birth rate has also fallen since 1900, but at a much slower pace, resulting in the world's population more than tripling in size in the intervening century. This difference in rates of change is down to the reality that, while family planning and contraception have some effect, birth rates are influenced primarily by cultural attitudes, not technological development.

The problem with this is that the past century's leaps forward in science and technology have been perhaps swifter than at any time in the past, and culturally we have not been able to keep up. In recent years people have become accustomed to certain commodities that are simply not sustainable, from free plastic carrier bags on every shopping trip, to year-round supplies of perishable foods flown in from the other side of the world. At the same time, when asked what kind of energy production they would like

to see expanded greatly, more often than not people will favour renewables such as wind and hydro generation – but when a wind farm is proposed in the near vicinity the very same people will argue against it because it is a blight on the landscape.

There needs to be an understanding that some sacrifices will have to be made in order for us to weather these many crises, powered by government incentives to accept change. These could take a range of forms, from grants or a share of electricity profits for communities that allow a wind farm nearby, through to actions as simple as introducing compulsory charges for carrier bags, or raising taxes on goods which are unnecessarily wasteful of energy.

However, these relate chiefly to Western, consumerist societies. Some attitudes relate to more universal problems, and lie so deep that we barely even realise that they are there; they are almost instinctive to us. One such attitude, which has lost more influence in the developed world than in developing countries, relates to people having large numbers of offspring in order to maximise the chances of some of them reaching adulthood and being able to look after their parents as they reach old age.

However, even in the developing world there have been huge reductions in infant mortality rates, but birth rates have not reflected these reductions. This is putting considerable strain on parents, who would in fact be better off with fewer children, and lack of education about family planning prevents this from changing as quickly as it should. There needs to be huge investment in programmes to tackle this, but more than that; countries and international organisations need to set a target of fertility rates of no more than 2 – a level which would see population trends level out and begin to decline slightly.

There are various ways of going about this, but perhaps the best is to offer incentives to families to have no more than two children – or disincentives for families which go over this threshold. These could take the form of tax breaks, or tax increases for larger families, which put a greater strain on the health and education systems. These actions may seem extreme, but to have a rising world population when energy and food resources are already stretched is madness.

Of course, this form of action alone will not end the crises we face. Binding treaties will be needed to create a unified response to international problems such as climate change and the supply of food and energy. A strong carbon trading agreement to limit carbon dioxide emissions is paramount, but there also needs to be help for less developed countries when it comes to the technology required to reduce carbon emissions, such as nuclear power.

It should also be remembered that localised efforts to improve energy efficiency are just as important as international treaties, and everything from community heating schemes to improvements in insulation should be given as much government support as possible. Above all, we need to remember that every contribution, however small or large, makes a difference, and we need to have the courage to make the tough decisions necessary for our race's survival.