

Vinyl 2010 Essay Competition

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Summary:

In the midst of a worldwide financial crisis, humanity staggers on. Where to, now? Our focus naturally shifts towards food and energy, as human development and survival are literally impossible without the both. What should we do? We, as citizens of the world, should definitely take matters in our own hands. We need to start acting, especially the more fortunate of us; we cannot keep sitting on our couches, watching mind-numbing TV shows in perpetual passivity as billions others suffer. If we only could change our mentality, along with our lifestyles, we could make our Earth a better place.

Essay:

The time for change has come. Our current model of “development” and the consequent indiscriminate exploitation of all Earth resources is no longer applicable: we have to radically change the way we live in order to survive. Today, a tiny minority of the human population is consuming an enormous percentage of the limited resources provided by our planet. Serious and reliable institutions such as the UN daily predict bad scenarios, statistical forecasts based on the yearly trends of resources consumption telling us that our natural resources are no match for our ever-growing appetite. At this rate, it’s a matter of a few decades at most. I think our political leaders should accept the challenge and commit to addressing the right choices, even though some decisions could appear unpopular at first glance. At the same time, we all should slip into the role of mature, truly democratic and conscious “citizens of the world”, as to realize and accept what is best for the sake of the next generations.

But what exactly can we do now?

First things first.

Energy saving. According to ENEL, Italy’s main energy provider (and third largest in the world), if about 50% of Italy’s standard “incandescent” light bulbs were changed with fluorescent lamps, we could nearly save 3 to 6 kW/h per day, per family: an amount of energy higher than the one generated by a 640 MW coal or oil power plant. The governments and the UN should provide benefits, such as reasonable tax deductions, to citizens or companies who successfully implement energy-saving policies.

Some examples are represented by the aforementioned fluorescent lamps, by governmental support of heating system upgrades and energy-saving construction engineering, and by low emissions car engines. Particularly the latter point has been taken seriously by the newly elected President of the United States. Indeed, one of the first actions taken by Barack Obama was the signing of an executive order which directs the

EPA (Environmental Protection Agency) to reconsider its refusal to grant California a waiver to regulate tailpipe-based greenhouse gas emissions. California estimates that the so-called "Clean Cars program" will reduce overall greenhouse gas emission from passenger cars by 18 percent in 2020.

At the same time, behaviors oriented toward energy wasting must be strongly dissuaded. Pollution taxes on air conditioners or unnecessary heating could be considered. The usage of highly polluting cars (i.e. cars with emissions higher than 150 mg CO₂/km) should be charged with high taxes and generally discouraged, for example by forbidding access to city centers. There should also be strong investments in the public transport sector, with regard to innovative ideas such as car sharing and car pooling, too.

Finally, investment in alternative energy sources with low or zero impact like solar, wind and geothermal energy should be encouraged. As far as solar energy is concerned, Greenpeace International estimates it to be capable of delivering energy to one billion people and jobs for two million by 2020, if enough capitals are invested. It is clear that a strong political address must direct this approach. Today, especially considering the oil price swinging at about 50\$/barrel, it is easier and cheaper to generate energy by simply burning oil. But in an open-minded, wise perspective, the best choice is obvious.

Moving on to the food resources issue, I do believe there are some basic considerations to be made. First of all, profit cannot be elevated to a god-like status, sacrificing the well-being of society and the survival of Earth's population. One of the most worrying aspects of the current food crisis is that the problem concerning us is not food abundance itself, or the lack thereof. The troubles originate from the tremendous inequality in food distribution. For example, in today's Europe the profit of agricultural entrepreneurs is guarded and saved by a strong protectionist law. The prices of fruit, milk, vegetables and their by-products are kept at high, profitable prices by cutting down the production (as prices are kept high by controlling the offer). The governments and the EU even pay to actually destroy thousands of tons of food every year! This is unacceptable: the food market must become more open, granting the products of African and Asian producers access to the rich countries' market.

The population growth rate must be controlled. We cannot keep expanding without any limitations, for our resources are not endless: therefore a meaningful percentage of the population will always have to suffer from lack of food. Nevertheless, I think birth control should not be imposed by totalitarian methods, but should rather be promoted through education and information. We need to overcome whatever preposterous ideological or religious barriers might be hindering us – and just start reasoning. I think that a focused, combined ONG and UN joint effort could effectively promote this principle

As far as Third World agriculture is concerned, the efficiency must be drastically improved. The spreading of microcredit banking and the implementation of multiple cultivation methods would be a great starting point.

But we need to be willing to sacrifice, even if just a little. For example, the European Union's "20-20-20" goals seem like a very good start to me – they involve reducing CO₂ emissions by 20%, increasing the energy efficiency by 20%, and achieving a 20% renewable energy mix by 2020. Nevertheless, as discussions were still progressing, Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi repeatedly and impetuously threatened to veto any deal that might have harmed Italy's interests. This is definitely what should not happen. We must learn to think about the future. The planet we live on is neither our own property, nor a house we have purchased. We are merely "renting" this incredibly beautiful apartment

for a very short time and it must be our commitment to leave it intact for its future inhabitants. We must break free from the shallow values of individualism and consumerism that are restraining us, and start looking at things from a global perspective - raising the flag of solidarity.