

Vinyl 2010 Essay Competition Submission

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Summary:

Our increasing need for food and energy creates competition for land and resources, whereby the growth in production of energy is inhibiting the inability to grow sufficient food for the global population. By not only changing our habits as consumers, and the focus and meaning behind production, but by reassessing our universal interests according to morality, human activity can be redirected from an individualist lifestyle to a communal one, to reinvent societal priorities. By recognising our interconnectedness with the ecosystem, rejecting over-industrialisation of food production, promoting low-carbon communities, and regaining agricultural independence, global food security can be restored.

Essay:

The dichotomy currently facing the human population is that of our the shortages that we are experiencing as a consequence of our irrevocable need for food and our persistent dependence upon energy. The Malthusian prophecy of a food crisis occurring as a result of the human population outstripping its resources seems to be realising itself at an ever-increasing speed, in spite of the planet's unfulfilled potential to feed the entire world population. Whilst explanations for the current lack of food are many, it cannot be denied that current operational solutions to the energy crisis are contributing greatly to the problem. As the availability of fossil fuels decreases, consequently pushing fuel prices up, the vigorous responsiveness of agri-business is hurriedly changing food crops into fuel crops in an effort to keep productivity up and prices down. The result is an impractical contest between fuel and food, a strain on our already struggling ecosystem and, put in even simpler terms, hunger.

In addition to, and as a consequence of, the 'umbrella' cause of over-population; a global increase in the consumption of meat, disturbed weather patterns arising from global warming, and rising oil prices, all contribute to the global food shortage. Meat intake is suggestible to regulation and change. Controls should be imposed on the import, export, and overall production of meat, and society thus be persuaded to eat less meat on a yearly basis. Vegetarianism is a useful contribution towards a positive result although it is unlikely to present an outright solution.

The ease with which global warming can be reversed is yet more difficult. Just as we are unable to predict accurately the actual damage we as humans have caused the planet via our various methods of producing greenhouse gases, it is equally impossible to predict the future following our attempts to reverse it, even if a determined schedule is enforced on a global scale. It is no longer just a matter of cause and effect. The essential efforts we need to reverse these effects will, however, be one and the same as those we need to cut down on our fuel consumption and thus our energy requirements.

The rise in oil prices is less easily resolved, as an effective, non-food sourced replacement for non-renewable energy sources has yet to be identified. But production drives demand and has therefore pushed the current economy to encourage bio fuels. If western society remains convinced of its need for the latest electrical gadgets, fast cars and cheap holidays, and the industrialised production of food itself continues at the current rate, our energy requirements will continue to be excessive and unrealistic. The production of bio fuels is ultimately as unsustainable as that of fossil fuels as it threatens to destroy our own, already unstable, ecological balance. But at the midst of a food crisis, the decision to use land suitable for food crops for any other purpose, surely also raises a moral question.

Morality should determine that we put the interests of society first. In this case, those interests are for every member of global society to have sufficient access to a nutritious, varied and affordable diet. Any act by which this basic right is threatened should be heavily scrutinised and acted upon by society as a whole. Yet because of the way food has been produced over the last 50 years, priorities have been distorted and diverted, placing more emphasis upon economic growth and success than basic human rights. This creates pockets of power and encourages excessive individualism, ultimately exacerbating the rich-poor divide to the point of endangering lives. Morality is a natural phenomenon and exists to encourage human cooperation. Our current principles of morality need to be recognised universally, rather than specifically ignored by those in power. Acknowledging our biological requirements as being the most important task at hand will allow us to begin to solve the food crisis, and by understanding that everything is a product of our culture, even the economy, we can learn to change our own actions, perpetuating change on a local and global scale in order to adapt successfully to our current situation.

By dramatically reassessing our energy needs, individually, socially, economically and politically, through actions as simple as effective changes in consumer habits, car-share incentive schemes and waste reduction, to more direct governmental mandates affecting fuel efficiency standards, it is possible to revolutionise our lifestyles and thus our energy dependence levels. Our need for energy, as a species, will always exist as long as we continue to grow in number and technologically, but the occurrence of the current crisis is a wake-up call to just how inefficient and greedy we have become since the advent of industrialisation. Selfishness and individualism has clouded our ability to make moral decisions.

In order to ensure our well-being as a global society, we should draw back from our individualist lifestyles and re-establish ourselves as a communal, humanistic race, investing in a strategy for sustainable food and energy production. Subsidies spent on inefficient biofuel production should instead be redirected into the strengthening of our ecosystems, by such methods as soil regeneration, traditional farming practice, hydroponics, and crop diversity. By rejecting the corporate, industrialised production of food, a concerted effort needs to be made by all societies to regain some level of agricultural independence, both by accessing land currently dominated by large agri-businesses, as well as by growing vegetables similar to that of the war effort, in backyards, school grounds and community spaces. Traditional farming methods should be embraced, as organically as possible, avoiding the use of GM, with the setting up of voluntary collective farms as well as supporting small, local producers. We must create low-carbon, sustainable communities that will have long-term security if disaster strikes

again. thus removing the emphasis off of economic growth, that has little meaning biologically, as a measure of success and onto sustainability as a means of survival.