

Is capitalism the cause of or solution to environmental problems?

Martell, L (1994), Ecology and Society: An Introduction, Cambridge, Polity Press.

- ~ arguments for capitalism as the solution
- ~ Martell's arguments against these
- ~ other ideas from text
- ~ my thoughts.

① It is in the interests of capitalists to be environmentally aware (p. 63/64)

- 1) deplete resources \Rightarrow less profit in future
- 2) "environmentally unsound" \Rightarrow "economically unsound"
- 3) can be adjustments to markets (eg. pollution taxes, green consumerism).

Martell's 3 criticisms of this:

- 1) short-termism "capitalists are often said to have a short term rather than a long term perspective.
- 2) Adaptation. Capitalists will just adapt once resources depleted.
- 3) Future generations. Probs. may affect future generations. Capitalists interested in NOW!

② Green Consumerism.

Capitalists can concentrate on making a profit on environmentally friendly products eg. Body Shop, Ecover.

"Acquisitive lifestyle can be compatible

with an altruistic concern for environment' (p. 65).

② NOT all products can be made in an environmentally friendly way.
STILL problem over-consumption.

- 1) information on products environmental friendliness may not be accurate.
- 2) expensive eg. organic food.
- 3) "levels rather than types of consumption are the real problem" (p. 70).

Martell does suggest green consumerism has advantages BUT also "limits" (p. 69)
Advantages. (p. 68)

1. case for modern industrialism
2. 3rd world interests
3. political effects.
4. individual activity empowers

→ BUT perhaps just gives people impression making change.

③ Market Values

Green pro-capitalists (eg Pearce)

"value of environmental services should be incorporated into cost of production (p. 66) eg. pollution taxes.

- costs may be passed to consumer (p. 70) ⇒ UNFAIR!
- Some businesses will pay + continue to pollute.

make taxes so high no business can afford
↓
Is this similar to an interventionist approach?

Economic liberal: liberal concerns more imp. than env.
↓
BUT damage to environment may curb freedom more.
ie. poor health ⇒ confined ②