



Assignment Undergraduate Dissertation coversheet & feedback form

PLEASE COMPLETE THE TOP SECTION OF THIS FORM AND SUBMIT ONE COPY WITH YOUR DISSERTATION

For completion by student:

Student Name: Ben Joynson

Student University Email:

Module code: HPPH6031

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Dissertation title:

Supervisor: Tutor: RH

Word count:

I confirm that this is my original work and that I have adhered to the University policy on plagiarism.

Signed

For completion by the first marker:

Comments: This is a perceptive & sophisticated piece of written work which displays a very good grasp of the issues at stake & of the difficulties involved in finding a way through the maze of vested interests. There is evidence of a deep engagement with relevant reading, although in places drawing on additional reading material (used for the module) could add detail & nuance to some of the points made (as could incorporating some of the issues to do with liberalism & people being free to form & enact their own conception of the good - this relates to Mill's harm principle). But, overall, this is an excellent piece of work.

First Marker's Mark:

Date:

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72%

21/3/23
very well thought-out.

21/3/23

Ben Johnson.

Does responsibility for action on the climate and biodiversity crisis rest with individuals or with collectives (such as states and corporations), or both?

Both individuals and collectives are responsible for actions related to the climate and biodiversity crisis because individuals are how collectives arise. I believe the complexity of the question rests in where the proportionality of responsibility for action should be in relation to addressing the crisis in the twenty-first century. Nation states, I believe, should be the primary force driving the action for climate and biodiversity goals. This is because the institutions of the state should have the perspective of ensuring a strong and enduring state over a time period spanning generations, not driven purely by short-term goals. Major corporations, I believe, hold a large proportion of responsibility because their actions often have direct effects on the natural world, with the extraction and exploitation of natural resources a key element to many corporations. ✓

Good introduction

A simple example of how states and corporations interact can be given. All modern states in the twenty-first century need electric power. This power can be attained in two ways, either it is created by the state along with the infrastructure that distributes, which in turn is managed by the state, or a corporation can create the power solution and build the infrastructure needed for the state. In the second example, the management of the power would typically be continued by the private enterprise that created it. In reality, these agreements are far more complex, but the basic principles given in this example are at the core principles of viewing the nature of corporate and government interactions. ✓

Where states, and corporations and international treaties are not new in the history of civilisation, the number of international committees comprising of states is. I argue that international collectives such as the United Nations and the organisation established by Brazil, Russia, China, India, and South Africa, collectively known as BRICS share responsibility toward the crisis. These combined collective agencies can hold a vast amount of power when unified but lose this power when opposed. While there are other collectives, such as international committees and non-profit companies, I believe these to be less critical fundamentally, as corporations and states often own their own non-profit organisations, needing different parameters for discussion. ✓

Liberalism relevant here

The primary reason I consider a state to be where the main responsibility for the climate and biodiversity rests, is because almost all humans live or reside in a country or state. Western states often have a form of democracy centred around the governance of the state, but other models are in existence. Russia is an example of an oligarchic state, and a form of communism exists in China. State control is centralised in both China and Russia making "[b]arriers to public involvement and social mobilisation... in those BRIC countries where civil society is closely monitored and censored by the state..." (Lo, 2015). All governments of states have different ideas of what constitutes as acting in the best interests of their citizens, but the existence of capital and the ability to harness natural resources is considered to be essential to all countries, regardless of their form of governance. ✓ Although the BRICS states may not be democratic, Alex Lo argues, "BRIC countries have made tremendous economic achievements and become powerful players in global environmental governance" (Lo, 2015). China and Russia are key examples of non-democratic states, and it is vital to recognise that seventy per cent of the world's population is living under

people free to choose their own conception of the good. Will you discuss?

dictatorships in large parts of Asia and other continents such as Africa and South America (Darian-Smith, 2022).

✓ Good. Apply what you say to this/apply the argument.

Western countries operate differently in many ways from both China and Russia. The United States and much of the continent of Europe are more democratic, meaning the citizens have a greater amount of input in how they want the state to be governed. Western countries are responsible for global pollution and environmental destruction through their demand for natural resources, both at home and in the international markets. Where those who live in western democracies like the United States or the United Kingdom may claim that their governments are accepting responsibility and taking action for the crisis, it is often forgotten that "climate change [is] being weaponised in political struggles over democratic principles and institutions" (Darian-Smith, 2022). This can lead to misinformation and inaction toward some of the goals that some members of the public would like to see addressed.

-Historically too.

Independent corporations carry out most trade transactions involving natural resources with the role of democratic states to monitor these big corporations to ensure they act according to the state law provided, with international law being harder to regulate. When environmental disasters happen due to mismanagement by a large corporation, state intervention often takes place in order to resolve the problem. This is proof of the interdependence of both state and corporate actors to each other. Eve Darina-Smith comments, "...in both developed and developing nations, corporations have benefitted from deregulated government oversight, massive tax cuts, and policies that favour their best interests..." (Darina-Smith, 2022).

I believe corporations are secondary in the chain of succession of responsibility in relation to the climate and biodiversity crisis. The corporations who I believe should be shouldering the greatest responsibility for action concerning the climate and crisis are primarily energy and mining corporations. This is because they are extracting natural resources from the planet, which often aggravates the crisis therefore a duty of care should be applied toward the environments they are exploiting for profit. Stuart Kirsch notes, "[m]ining companies routinely externalise a significant proportion of the costs of production onto society and the environment." (Kirsch, 2014). Energy companies often do the same by having certain agreements with state governments to protect the interests of the energy company.

Could draw on the sustainable development - reaching here

Most corporations however are not power companies; they deliver different services to both public and private business sectors. This results in different priorities for different businesses and industries. Vivek Ramaswamy makes critical observations about the separation in priorities that an executive owner of a major corporation has, compared to those of state officials. Business CEOs have an obligation called a fiduciary duty toward the companies they own and or manage. This obligation is "...the highest form of trusted obligation that one person can legally owe another. It's the same obligation your lawyer owes you [when a will is created]" (Ramaswamy, p65, 2021). The obligation is centred around the idea that CEOs must put profits for the corporation the primary interest of the company. If acquiring sustainably sourced and environmentally friendly goods benefits the company financially, the CEO would be obligated to engage in the transaction. Suppose a better offer of cheaper goods which is not sustainably sourced or environmentally friendly is found? In that case, the CEO is legally obliged to consider this offer, discuss it with a board

of directors or shareholders and accept it if the other members of the company wish to cut the costs of production to maximise profits.

Not all corporations strictly adhere to this philosophy of pure profit for the corporation. Ramaswamy claims his company, Roivant Sciences, the main goal is developing effective treatments for people with chronic illnesses. Profits are a vital part of achieving this goal but not the central driving force of the company. Ramaswamy gives other examples of corporations that are not purely about profit in their philosophical outlook, but accepts that in the world of corporate business, where millions and billions of dollars are at stake, ethical practices are usually not the driving force for a corporate conglomerate. Ramaswamy also highlights that many CEO executives are not trained or equipped to address with and resolve social problems. He argues that in relation to decisions on climate change and world poverty, "CEOs are no better suited to make these decisions than an average politician is to, say, make the R&D decisions of a pharma company." (Ramaswamy, p19, 2021). Ramaswamy emphasises that executive CEOs often lack the skill and qualities needed to address social and political decisions. This is because a CEO or board of executives are trained in business matters not political issues and, perhaps more importantly, have no legal obligation to prioritise social and climate goals. ✓ Good.

The politician's role is to facilitate action, make decisions and create or negate legislation to help the corporation produce the goods or services for the state in which the politician resides. It is the legal obligation for the politician to be versed in climate and biodiversity issues as well as other issues that concern the state and the population of the state. The politician should both assist corporations and hold them accountable, when necessary, all with the interest of the state and or the citizens of the state in mind. Good. Will you mention political will?

The other collective agents I believe share responsibility for action for the environmental crisis are the multitude of international assemblies like the UN, BRICS, NATO and the UNASUR. The decisions of these organisations have a direct impact on what happens within the climate and biodiversity crisis in the twenty-first century. Countries within these organisations can often disagree on ways to conduct their affairs, resulting in different goals, but collective action could help resolve the climate crisis or accelerate the process. It is frequently forgotten that states and corporations are comprised of individuals that make these decisions. The perception is often to view a state or corporation as an independent entity that acts independently of other states or corporations, but this is a false perception. The problem is political will.

As an individual private citizen, I hold a small amount of power to create substantial action concerning the climate and biodiversity crisis. Eating sustainable food and being mindful of my means of travel are just a few ways I can help the crisis. The philosophy surrounding this theory is that if all humans act in accordance with these ideals of sustainability, many issues surrounding this topic will recede. While there is a form of truth to this idea, the argument fails to recognise the differences of opinions in the world about the approach to produce the best course of action and to address the climate and biodiversity crisis in the twenty-first century. As demonstrated in this essay, the states and corporations of which individuals are a part have a more significant impact and influence than non-powerful or wealthy individuals. This theory also fails to recognise the difference in power between an individual

who is an executive of a major corporation, or a government representative when compared to the power held by an ordinary citizen like myself. Ramaswamy comments,

Corporations may not be people, but CEOs definitely are... there's a difference between speaking up [as a CEO] and using your company's market power to foist your own views onto society while avoiding rigors of public debate..." (Ramaswamy p19, 2021) ✓

The reality is that the buying power held by major corporations outweighs that of a average private world citizen, even when the citizens decide to work as collectives against the corporation and or states. As a result of the billions of dollars corporations hold, they can have significantly more political power than the average citizen. Individuals can form collective movements in protest of certain corporations and states, often attempting to boycott them. I agree with Ramaswamy's argument that "[b]oycotts can give the superficial illusion that they're a tool of mass mobilisation, but they take political issues to territory that naturally favours the wealth." (Ramaswamy, p289, 2021). He further adds to the argument by claiming that the boycott itself, in certain scenarios, can harm the protestor. This disparity in wealth is displayed when the poorer sect of societies make daily financial decisions concerning food, for example. Picking sustainably sourced and or organically grown produce is often not a priority for people on low levels of income as these types of products come at a significantly higher monetary cost. ✓

In conclusion, I believe the chain of responsibility for resolving the climate and biodiversity crisis rests primarily with collective organisations such as states and corporations. The citizens and individuals who reside within the countries of the world all share a lower level of responsibility, as the average world citizen is not a member of a government or a corporate executive multi-millionaire. Globalisation and the advances of twenty-first-century technology have allowed all populations and governments to expand social, cultural and economic interests more rapidly and comprehensively than at any point in history. Governments not only set the guidelines in which citizens can operate by but set the rules and regulations that corporations adhere to also. I agree with Ramaswamy that the governments must hold corporations accountable, while at the same time, continue to develop and outline the interests of the nation without severe corporate influence. The reason he argues is that in democracies, buying power should not translate into voting and political power, the will of the people should be considered when addressing a nations problem. This translates to the crisis because as Lo observes, "[i]nformed public support is crucial for enhancing the legitimacy of environmental actions and campaigns championed by civil organisations." (Lo, 2016). This translates to the idea that greater public awareness could bring more solutions to resolving the crisis. I agree with Darian-Smith who argues that,

...despite moments of optimism with the election of pro-climate leaders... [such as] the passing of domestic legislation in the US aimed to transition towards renewable energy, what we are witnessing over the long term is a widespread international correlation between dying democracies and dying ecological systems. (Darian-Smith, 2022).

~~I~~ believe Th this is the unfortunate reality of the world in the twenty-first century, post Covid. Many corporations have experienced record profits while the world population experienced and continue to experience severe financial difficulty. The complexity and scale of the climate and biodiversity crisis means there is no one single solution to any of these problems. The danger is real, with the true consequences of inaction toward the climate and biodiversity crisis unknown. The reliance of human existence ^{on} to the external natural world must be recognised, with the acknowledgement that the destruction of the natural world, is the destruction of humanity also.

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