

## 2.4 Environmentalism

### Introduction

Environmentalism shares with socialism many of its criticisms of capitalism. However, whereas socialism and other ideologies tend to focus on the distribution of power and of resources between individuals within a society, and the relationship between individuals and the state, environmentalism takes as its starting point the central importance of the relationship between mankind as a whole and the environment. This provides a wholly different perspective on the state.

### Environmentalist criticisms of capitalism

1. Capitalism is based upon the exploitation of people and other natural resources. Capitalism sees nature as something to be exploited.
2. Capitalism creates and nurtures false desires and demands through advertising. This leads to the production of unnecessary goods that waste finite resources. This waste, coupled to unnecessary advertising and packaging, is unjustifiable.
3. Manufacturers ensure that their products have deliberately high fail-rates in order to make sure that they have a constant demand for their products. They also ensure that their products have inbuilt redundancy. That is to say, even if they still work (i.e. have not failed), goods will in time become redundant because the manufacturers have a limited interest in maintaining old products compared to their interest in selling new products.
4. Within a market it is very difficult to make companies accountable for the environmental damage that they do because the environmental impact of their actions often only becomes apparent years later.

### Case study: lightbulbs

Manufacturers have the ability to produce lightbulbs that can last for decades, yet they persist in producing ones that last for a year. This is because they need to maintain business. If they sell you a lightbulb that lasts ten times as long, then they will have to charge you a lot more because they are missing out on the sale of nine normal lightbulbs. The environmental impact of producing millions of standard short-life lightbulbs is not taken into the equation.

### Case study: personal computers

Personal computers have an inbuilt redundancy and this is made more apparent when manufacturers produce software that will only run on computers with the latest specifications. Many computers over five years old simply end up in landfill sites even though they are still serviceable. Advertising is also used to create false demand for higher specification machines.

### What does environmentalism involve?

Environmentalism focuses on creating a **more balanced relationship between people and the environment**.



It requires a greater emphasis on **sustainability** and **conservation**. This needs to take place on a global level as well as national and local levels.



This emphasis on sustainability necessitates a better distinction between **needs** and **wants**. This might involve individuals becoming more **self-reliant**. It might require individuals to get involved in local initiatives redistributing resources according to need or recycling valuable and scarce resources, in order to preserve existing stocks and minimise the need for environmentally damaging chemical and industrial processes.



All of this activity would combine to produce a **legacy for future generations** that would be far more positive than the one currently under construction.

### Case study: gorillas and PlayStations

On July 4, 2001 *The Guardian* reported that the eastern lowland gorilla population in the national park on the borders of Congo, Rwanda and Uganda has been made almost extinct by the destruction of their habitat caused by mining for Coltan (colombo tantalite), a mineral used as a hardening agent for metals in hi-tech industries. A shortage of this material in 2000 apparently led to the world-wide shortage of Sony PlayStation 2s at that time. Biologist Jane Goodall predicts that, at the present rate, great apes will be extinct in 10–15 years as a result of logging, the trade in 'bush-meat' and mining.