

Major Research Essay

Due Date: April 11th (place TBA)

Value: 40% of your final mark

Length: 12-15 pages (excluding images, bibliography)

Format: typed, double-spaced, 12-point font, Times New Roman, hard copy only, properly formatted bibliography (MLA or APA) containing *at least* six relevant academic sources, four of which must come from off the syllabus

Essay Description:

1. *Modern Technique:* Examine a modern technique and explain how it works to create social and environmental change. For example, you could examine urban planning, waste disposal, work patterns, car driving, food production, digital communication, the generation of energy, architecture, international trade, exercise, immigration, tourism or the consumption of nature. In your analysis, draw on Jacques Ellul's definition of technique as a system that goes beyond any single technology or machine, involving a complex set of relationships between people and objects that has been arranged to increase efficiency, standardization and rational activity. Use Ellul's definition to explore how this technique changes the way people relate to each other and the natural environment (e.g by changing how people use, interact with, or imagine nature). Also explain how this technique has become self-augmenting, or a *means* that has become an *end* in itself by expanding into different areas of life.

2. *Cultural Milieu:* Examine a specific cultural milieu, using Aplin et al.'s definition of cultural milieux as local contexts where human systems interact with biophysical systems in particular (and possibly unique) ways. A cultural milieu can be a city, region, country or even local ecosystem where multiple communities overlap. For this option you are required to examine a particular milieu by describing its distinctive natural features (water, land, energy resources, climate, etc.) and cultural features (population characteristics, economic sectors, political actors, settlement patterns, transportation, etc.), and detailing how some of these natural and cultural features interact or relate to one another. In your examination, explain how this particular combination of biophysical and cultural features modifies how people who live within this milieu use and think about their natural environment.

3. *Environmental Problem:* Examine a global environmental problem that relates to the actions of humans and society (i.e. it is caused, in part, by anthropogenic factors). You could examine one of the broad environmental crises highlighted by Aplin et al., namely deforestation, greenhouse gas emissions and other atmospheric pollution, land degradation associated with agriculture, water pollution, or urbanization. You could also choose to examine a more specific environmental problem (so long as it carries global significance) such as suburban sprawl,

biodiversity loss, disasters related to weather/climate, automobile dependence, collapse of honey bee populations, oil and gas spills or overpopulation. For this option you are required to examine why this problem is global in scale yet exerts a variable impact on different localities. You must also investigate specifically how humans have contributed to the creation or exacerbation of this problem (e.g. through modern technology, mass consumption, fossil fuel use, etc.) as well as social and technological steps humans can take toward solutions.