

Communist and capitalist societies

Model sentence: In this answer I will compare and contrast the environmental value systems of **communist** and **capitalist** societies.

Communist societies have been criticized for their poor environmental record. For example, between 1947 and 1991 the Buna chemical works in East Germany dumped ten times more mercury into its neighbouring river than chemical work plants in West Germany. Cars in the East emitted 100 times more carbon monoxide than those in the West, because they did not have catalytic converters to remove this toxic gas. East German sulfur dioxide concentrations were also an environmental issue, and were the highest in the world at the time. This was due to the combustion of fossil fuels in power plants and industries across the country, and a failure to remove this gas from emissions. Some people argue that the economic principles of communism inevitably lead to environmental disaster. In communist countries it is thought that people see free natural resources as having use-value to humans alone. The communist ideal of equal distribution of resources with no profit motive means that energy, materials, and natural resources can be squandered without care.

In contrast, the capitalist model is seen by some as being environmentally friendly. People see in the capitalist model that the free market imposes checks and balances to ensure sound use of resources in order to maximize profits.

The actual story is more **complex**. Many of the criticisms of the communist environmental record stem from the period of the **Cold War**. Such criticism was used against the communist states to justify the Cold War. Capitalism itself has a mixed record with regard to the environment. In Germany, before **reunification**, the communist state (East Germany) had protected the interests of farmers, foresters, and fishermen. The state therefore unintentionally benefited certain sectors of the environment. The rise of capitalism in the former communist state led to polluters organizing into powerful **lobbies** to protect their own interests without consideration for the environment.

A state's response to environmental concerns is not just a matter of political **doctrine**. Many factors contribute, such as technology, wealth, geography, economic decision making, and **democratic** structures. In capitalist societies, **civil liberties** and the role of democracy may have played a more significant role in **combating** environmental problems than the capitalist basis of the system.

Judaeo-Christian and Buddhist societies

Model sentence: In this answer I will compare and contrast the environmental value systems of Judaeo-Christian and Buddhist societies.

The view of the environment in Judaeo-Christian religions is one of **stewardship**. Stewardship is a concept where humans have a role of responsibility towards the Earth. The Genesis story suggests that God put humans in charge of the planet. Other biblical stories indicate that humanity should make the most of this gift as **stewards**.

The Judaeo-Christian value system contrasts with the Buddhist approach to the environment. The Buddhist value system sees the human being as an **intrinsic** part of nature rather than a steward. Buddhism is sometimes seen as an ecological philosophy. This is because of its value system rather than anything that appears in Buddhist texts. Buddhism emphasizes human interrelationships with all other parts of nature. Buddhism supports the belief that it is unrealistic to think of ourselves as isolated from the rest of nature and that we are in fact a part of nature. The concept of **reincarnation** also emphasizes humanity's interconnectedness with nature. Buddhist monks are frequently active in a range of campaigns, including forest conservation in Thailand.

Indigenous Americans and European pioneers

Model sentence: In this answer I will compare and contrast the environmental value systems of indigenous American people and European pioneers.

North America was home only to indigenous Native American tribes before the colonization by Europeans in the late 16th century. Native Americans saw their environment as being shared and had a **subsistence** economy based on **barter**. Their low-impact technologies meant that they lived in harmony with the environment. Living in harmony with nature was supported by their **animistic** religion.

The incoming European pioneers operated frontier economics, which involved the exploitation of what they saw as unlimited resources. This inevitably led to environmental degradation through over-population and lack of connection with the environment. It also led to heavy and technologically advanced industry, and unchecked exploitation of natural resources.