Negative Case: Mutually Compatible

I’m going to do something a little different in this debate. Rather than run a traditional value and contentions, I will argue that there is something so fundamentally wrong with the resolution that it cannot possibly be true. I will prove this in a series of four points.

Since the resolution cannot be true, it cannot be measured. Thus, I reject my opponent’s value.

If you like to keep track of expert evidence in your notes, leave plenty of room in this first point.

# Thesis: Mutually Compatible

Protecting the environment is expensive. Developing countries simply can’t afford to do many of the things that environmental protection demands. The solution isn’t to shy away from economic growth, but to lean into it so we can afford to do it right. Higher GDP leads to recycling, investment in renewable resources, cleaner industry, and so on. At the same time, protecting the environment promotes public health and protects sustainable access to resources, which bolsters the economy. It’s a positive feedback loop in which each side of the resolution promotes the other.

Terry L. Anderson is a distinguished Senior Fellow at the Property and Environment Research Center and author of thirty-seven books on economic and environmental matters. He wrote an article in 2004 titled “Why Economic Growth is Good for the Environment.” Here’s an excerpt:

“Put simply, poor people are willing to sacrifice clean water and air, healthy forests, and wildlife habitat for economic growth. But as their incomes rise above subsistence, "economic growth helps to undo the damage done in earlier years," says economist Bruce Yandle. "If economic growth is good for the environment, policies that stimulate growth ought to be good for the environment."[[1]](#footnote-2)

According to The Economist 2008:

Mr Esty's analysis suggests that as poor countries get richer, they usually invest heavily in environmental improvements, such as cleaning up water supplies and improving sanitation, that boost human health. (Their economies may also shift gear, from making steel or chemicals to turning out computer chips.)[[2]](#footnote-3)

We can visualize the relationship between growth and the environment as a climb over a hill.[[3]](#footnote-4) Pre-industrial countries tend to do minimal damage to the environment. As they grow into industrialized nations, they climb up to the hill and the environmental damage temporarily goes up. But as the economy finishes maturing into a post-industrial service economy, we go down the other side of the hill and the environment is actively protected.

I can’t take credit for that mental image – it was described by the award-winning Dr. Theodore Panayotou. He has a Ph.D in Economics and is the Director of the Center for International Development at Harvard University.[[4]](#footnote-5) I’m about to quote from his 2000 paper “Economic Growth and the Environment.” The language is pretty technical here; this is after several pages of in-depth analysis of several studies. It’s just a few sentences; listen for his description of the hill I mentioned earlier:

“At lower levels of income, the dominant shift is from agriculture to industry with a consequent increase of pollution intensity. At higher incomes, the dominant shift is for industry to services with a consequent decrease in pollution intensity.”

In the next paragraph, he concludes:

“On the demand side, at low incomes, increases in income are directed towards food and shelter, and have little effect on the demand for environmental quality; at higher income levels, rising income leads to increased demand for environmental quality since the latter is a normal (if not a superior) good.”[[5]](#footnote-6)

I want to make sure that you can have absolute confidence in this economic model, so I’m going to offer one more piece of terminally qualified evidence.

Here’s an excerpt from a Background Paper for the World Bank 1992 World Development Report. It’s written by Principal Economist Dennis Anderson, who is now the Director of the Centre for Energy Policy and Technology at Imperial College of Science, Technology, and Medicine, London. I quote:

“Addressing environmental problems efficiently should be viewed as a means of raising economic growth and living standards in developing countries, not of reducing them - contrary to the standard historical and contemporary view in industrial countries.”

On the next page, he says:

“The costs of avoiding pollution or environmental damage are often less than the costs of incurring it. The costs of incurring such damage take many forms, including the impact of air and water pollution on health and amenities, the loss of time and output caused by urban congestion, the health implications of hazardous wastes and poor waste treatment and disposal practices, and the decline in productivity of soils and forests that results from unsustainable agricultural and forestry practices.”[[6]](#footnote-7)

To summarize these four pieces of evidence: there is an academic consensus that economic growth protects the environment, and that sustainable environmental practices promote economic growth.

The remaining three points are pretty simple.

# Conflict: Exclusive vs Compatible

My opponent is trying to convince you that you need to choose the economy over the environment. But to do that, he must first prove that such a choice exists. That’s what this debate will be about. If at the end of the round you agree with the experts that the two are compatible rather than exclusive, I’ll ask you to vote negative.

Here’s a better way of approaching the resolution.

# Alternative: Maximize Both

A fully developed world is the best chance the environment has.

According to the 1987 report of the UN World Commission on Environment and Development:

“The environment does not exist as a sphere separate from human actions, ambitions, and needs, and attempts to defend it in isolation from human concerns have given the very word "environment" a connotation of naivety in some political circles. The word "development" has also been narrowed by some into a very limited focus, along the lines of "what poor nations should do to become richer", and thus again is automatically dismissed by many in the international arena as being a concern of specialists, of those involved in questions of "development assistance". But the "environment" is where we all live; and "development" is what we all do in attempting to improve our lot within that abode. The two are inseparable.”[[7]](#footnote-8)

# Impact: Resolution cannot be Affirmed

Let’s push every country to grow into environmental sustainability by bolstering economic growth and abandon the harmful idea that we can have one without the other. By rejecting this resolution, you’re sending a positive signal that developing countries don’t have to choose between two evils. They don’t have to starve in poverty or suffocate in smog. They can develop and participate in the wonders of the modern era just as first world countries like ours already have. Thank you.

1. Terry L. Anderson, “Why Economic Growth is Good for the Environment” Property and Environment Research Center 2004 No.3 Summer <http://www.perc.org/articles/why-economic-growth-good-environment> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. The Economist, “How green is their growth” January 24, 2008. <http://www.economist.com/node/10566738> Daniel Esty is an environmental lawyer and Hillhouse Professor of Environmental Law and Policy at Yale University. <https://www.law.yale.edu/daniel-c-esty> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. This paragraph describes a Kuznets Curve. The term is omitted to make the argument more accessible to untrained audiences. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. Panayotou’s Credentials: <http://web.mit.edu/hellenic/www/symposium/Panayotou.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. Theodore Panayotou, “Economic Growth and the Environment” United Nations Commission for Europe, July 2000. <http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/ead/sem/sem2003/papers/panayotou.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. Dennis Anderson, “Economic Growth and the Environment” The World Bank, September 1992. <http://www-wds.worldbank.org/servlet/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/1992/09/01/000009265_3961003082048/Rendered/PDF/multi0page.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. “Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development: Our Common Future” United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development, April 1987. <http://www.un-documents.net/our-common-future.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-8)