Cutting down the brazilian rainforest is wrong

Science, Chemistry

Cutting down the Brazilian rainforest is not a morally just thing to do. Not only does leave the soil sterile and cut the land used for crops' life in half, but it also eliminates the opportunity for new medicines to be found, new plants to use for treatment in the medical field, and petroleum substitutes to be collected and used, just to name a few. In addition, the presence of the rainforest helps protect us from global warming and keeps some of the rarest and beneficial animals and their homes alive. However, many people feel that the cities in Brazil are very crowded and the opening of the Amazon basin for people to live will be beneficial to the overcrowding problem. Also, by cutting down the rainforest, Brazil makes good money selling the lumber to Japan. With the construction of new roadways that lead to the Amazon Rainforest, the government was able to make money while relocating many of its inhabitants. The problem that arises from Brazil's rainforest dilemma is that the various benefits and harms of the development of forest are incommensurable and not easily weighed. They involve the weighing of differences between global and local goods - the benefits of selling lumber and creating ranches for local populations versus the possible global benefits of a potential cure for cancer or a contribution to the reduction of greenhouse gases. Cutting Down the Rainforest Rids the Land of All Nutrients and Makes it Infertile The rainforest was cut down by the original pioneers and primarily the ranchers' workforces, and then burnt during the dry season. The ash from the forest was then used to fertilize the crops or fodder they developed. The constraints of the rainforest's soil are pivotal to the much concern that arose from this technique of clearing, burning, and then planting. This technique could render worthwhile crops, but only for a short

time - from between 2-3 years to 10-12 years. After this, however, the landowners are compelled to move elsewhere to carry on with their technique. This is due to the fact that the rainforest contains no topsoil, and farming and cultivation is not able to be prolonged or sustainable. The soil in the rainforest is remarkable for its lack of nutrients. Therefore, the forests are deemed to be one of the most delicate biomes in the world. The soil in the rainforest is so sterile primarily for two reasons: firstly, the inundating rains of the tropics causes any topsoil or organic matter present, to be washed away so that it does not have time to stay and decay, and secondly, whatever nutrients are present are securely situated within the huge biomasses of the trees. Therefore, when the trees are sold as raw lumber the nutrients are also sold. If, alternatively, the trees are burnt for the function of fertilization this is a definitive and once-off act. The rate at which substances decay in the tropics also proves to be a problem. Due to the enormous heat and humidity within the rainforests decaying soil and litter quickly changes into a " hardpan of inorganic minerals with no supporting organic humus ... In temperate latitudes, a leaf takes about a year to decompose, and the combination of the decomposing organisms, the products of their metabolism, the partially decomposed organic material, and the soil minerals, all form part of the humus that builds up topsoil (Dillingham, C and Newton, L: 1994. p150)." This will not occur in the rainforests; once the forest and soil have been plundered, they will not return. The question that hence arises is why the landowners continue in this bootless and unavailing act, knowing that their ranches turn to desert after the technique of cutting and burning is implemented? The reason seems to be that they place a

higher value on the easy money made than that of the rainforest. They are not concerned whether the rainforest is destroyed, so long as they can own that destroyed land. The ranchers desire the land, without interference from the indigenous peoples. Shoumatoff asserts, " The cattle are a smoke-screen for land speculation. The forest is not even being converted to hamburgers. Most of it is going up in smoke to augment the holdings of the 1 percent of Brazilians who own most of the country's arable land, the majority of which is not in use." Forces of human inequality, national and individual poverty are all at play here. The ranchers are therefore consenting to the destruction of the rainforest, so that the land becomes valueless and they can then purchase it cheaply. This is completely legal in Brazil, as it is in the majority of the world, but that doesn't mean that it is morally right. Cutting Down the Rainforest Eliminates Our Chances of Finding Helpful Ingredients Scientists are affected due to deforestation. Valuable plants, which could have been used to find new drugs and medicines, are lost. These plants could save the lives of millions of people all over the world, but are lost as a result of the destruction of the rainforests. Vast potential biological wealth will be destroyed. Still undeveloped medicines, crops, pharmaceuticals, timber, fibers, pulp, soil-restoring vegetation, petroleum substitutes, and other products and amenities will never come to light. It is fashionable in some quarters to wave aside the small and obscure, the bugs and weeds, forgetting that an obscure moth from Latin America saved Australia's pastureland from overgrowth by cactus, that the rosy periwinkle provided the cure for Hodgkin's disease and childhood lymphocytic leukemia, that the bark of a yew offers hope for victims of ovarian and breast cancer, that a

chemical from the saliva of leeches dissolves blood clots during surgery, and so on down a roster already grown long and illustrious despite the limited research addressed to it. (Wilson, E: 1992. p. 190) How do we know that the cure for a disease or an ingredient for a medicine is not hidden in the rainforest? How will we know if it gets cut down? Wilson lists above just but a few of the many utilitarian benefits of the rainforest, and not even the most crucial. Rainforests act as carbon storehouses and henceforth, protect us from global warming - this is essential to for our continued existence on earth. In addition, while living trees remove carbon dioxide, a major greenhouse gas, from the air, destroyed trees release the carbon dioxide stored in their tissues. Deforestation contributes to roughly 25% of global carbon dioxide emissions. According to new findings released by Oregon State University scientists, old growth forests have the ability to absorb and store vast amounts of carbon dioxide. " It appears these older forests are more active and may be stronger carbon sinks than we thought," said Bill Winner, an OSU professor of botany and plant pathology (Kutcher, Gary: 1998). Previous research has shown that clear cutting turns a forest from a carbon sink to a carbon source contributing to carbon dioxide pollution. Slash burning has also been shown to add significant amounts of carbon dioxide to the atmosphere. Humans Should Be Treating the Rainforest and Its Inhabitants with Respect Humans may be superior to plants and animals, but they are supposed to be moral beings and should act accordingly. Through analyzing the three distinct theories of moral responsibility to the environment, one can clearly see why the environment should be treated with respect. The first of these theories is anthropocentrism, or human-

centered. Environmental anthropocentrism holds the view that all environmental responsibility is derived from egocentric human needs alone. The assumption here is that only human beings are morally significant beings and have a direct moral standing. Since the environment is crucial to human well-being and human survival, we have an indirect duty towards the environment, that is, a duty that is derived from human interests. This involves the duty to assure that the earth remains environmentally hospitable for supporting human life, and that the beauty and resources are preserved for their aesthetic and essential qualities. It is argued that our indirect environmental duties derive both from the immediate benefit that living people receive and the benefits that future generations will receive. This resource equity principle proposes that everyone in the world, including future generations, is entitled to an equitable share of the benefits of the world's natural resources. A second approach to environmental responsibility is an extension of the strong animal rights view. Supposedly, if at least some animals qualify as morally significant beings, then our responsibility toward the environment is also dependent on the environmental interests of these animals. From this point of view, environmental responsibility derives from the interest of all morally significant beings, which includes both human beings and at least some animals. This approach is, however, still indirect. The third and most radical approach to environmental responsibility is known as eco-centrism. This approach maintains that the environment deserves direct moral consideration, and not consideration that is merely derived from human (and animal) interests. It is suggested that the environment has direct rights, that it is deserving of direct duty, and that it has inherent

worth. According to Wilson, " Wilderness has virtue unto itself and needs no extraneous justification (Wilson, E: 1992. p. 282)." While this view is exceedingly hard to justify, it proves to be quite hard not to subscribe to the notion that mankind should promote fostering the rainforest just because it is there. Religious or metaphysical motivations also stimulate environmental awareness. It is believed by some that every creature or life-form was implicitly placed on the earth, not by any of our doing, but through a higher body. It, therefore, follows that mankind has a responsibility to preserve these creations. Whatever the personal viewpoint, it is understood as accepted that the dynamic, self-organizing systems humans have evolved within, known as ecosystems, must remain 'healthy' if humans are to thrive. Cutting Down the Rainforest Reduces Congestion in the Cities and Helps Pay Off Debt During the 1960s, Brazil was burdened with the heavy responsibility of a huge foreign debt and a rapidly increasing population of already 70 million people. The Amazon basin, which covers 50 percent of Brazil's territory, was home to only 35 percent of the population. The rest of the Brazilians, mostly landless, were congesting the coastal cities. Increased colonization of the Amazon gave the impression of being a coherent and plausible resolution to the debt problem and the overcrowding of urban domains (Case, K and Fair, R: 1989. p. 881). Indonesia's " Transmigration" policy, which required the displacement of 140 million people from the over-populated islands to the less-populated ones from 1950 to 1985, was observed as a successful model by the Brazilian authorities (Shoumatoff). Brazil could help relieve its debt by cutting down logs in the rainforest and selling them to Japan, a nation with a market always readily disposed to the

acquisition of raw lumber by moving its people. The Brazilian government, hence, devised a detailed procedure to construct motorways deep into the remote basin of the Amazon so that roughly 30 million people might hopefully migrate there and seize virtually free land. The orchestrators of the procedure anticipated the land not only to be beneficial for a rise in lumber to be sold for foreign exchange, but also as a system of land reform that would not result in any adversity towards the minority of rich and influential proprietors of Brazil's most productive land. Throughout Latin America it is estimated that less than 2 percent of all landowners control almost 75 percent land under cultivation (Case, K and Fair, R: 1989. p. 881). The Trans-Amazon Highway began construction in 1972, spreading out into bleak and spartan territories like Rondonia in the northeast. As the year of 1972 reached its close, 1200 kilometers of the highway was completed and opened. Approximately 70, 000 families left their current living quarters in the cities and rural areas to take claim of this new advantage. By 1980, one million kilometers of the highway was functioning, and it is estimated that cumulatively about 100, 000 families were lead by the government to free 250-acre wooded plots, provided to anyone who would take and clear them. More Negative than Positive Came From the Move to the Open Land Even though the highway was beneficial to opening up more land for Brazilians to live, it was being built by exploited and malaria-ridden work crews. The amount of people who died during this construction is not known, but estimated to be very high (Shoumatoff). The government also guaranteed the creation of schools, churches and other facilities, none of which took shape. The length of time that the majority of these people, who attempted

to create homes in the Amazon, stayed there was fleeting before they deserted the pipe dream and returned to their origin, overpowered by sickness, malaria in particular, the infertile soil, and the decrease in the world price of coffee. Once these families fled this area, where they were once led by government and promised things, the government offered provisions. These provisions incorporated tax breaks and financed loans and credits, which did attract certain individuals - wealthy ranchers. These ranchers could effectively and proficiently clear the land in order to advance in this gamble-free, secure opportunity. The government paid all their costs and expenditures, and they got to keep all their profits. The ranchers tread in the heels of the optimistic pioneers with the constant objective of supplanting them, or for that matter, any indigenous people, such as the Indians, who might present themselves as an obstacle. Once a Plant is Found, It Can Be Reproduced Synthetically Once one plant or piece of a plant that may aid in medicinal purposes is found and tested, it is not necessary to keep the whole rain forest alive just for one plant that can later be synthetically produced. Also, they can not only reproduce the piece of the plant, but in some cases they may be able to grow a whole new plant and try to keep it alive by making a similar habitat to its Amazon habitat. They may grow the plant and then through pollination or reproduction, more plants can then be grown. Therefore, this makes the prevalence of this plant even larger and its life longer. What If a Plant is Only Found in One Place? However, if a plant is only indigenous to one part of the rainforest and that plot of land has already been destroyed, we will never be able to see if that plant had any medical marvels within its composition. Therefore, there is no

way to pick and choose which parts of the rainforest are to be destroyed. Thus it shouldn't be destroyed at all because we may be losing the only answer we have to diseases and/or medicines. (http://raintree. com/facts. htm). Thinking that the Rainforest is Special is How this Problem Started The rainforest and its inhabitants, plant or animal, need to stop being treated as if they were humans. Just as animals don't have rights because they can't reason, plants do not have rights either. Just as Descartes managed to ignore the obvious when he said that animals were unfeeling machines, there is considerable evidence that plants are much more aware than we commonly believe. Using a definition of pain that is based on possession of a nervous system deliberately and arbitrarily excludes plants. Yet, plants are clearly aware of when they are being attacked because they mobilize chemical defenses. Plants have no need to feel pain since they cannot move away from the source of the pain like animals can. This loopy idea of treating plants and animals as if they were human was where the whole controversy began. Because animals and plants cannot feel things like fear or reason, they should not have rights. Ranchers should be able to cut down the forest and make money off of it and not think twice about the animals. (Wilson, E: 1992. p. 196). Humans Don't Have the Right to Everything Just because we are humans and feel superior to all other beings doesn't mean that we shouldn't treat other living things with respect. Animals, plants, insects and all living beings have a reason for being on this earth; sometimes that reason is to help humans. For example, ladybugs may be pests, but for a gardener or a farmer, the ladybugs eat the unwanted residue on plants. Because these living beings are indirectly related to humans, humans feel that they have

control. The reality is, if humans act as they are said to be, moral beings, then humans would be respecting all life, including the plants and animals found in the Amazon Rainforest. Conclusion In conclusion, it is obvious to see that the cutting down of the Amazon Rainforest is not only a morally wrong thing to do, but it brings more damage than benefits to Brazil. Bibliography

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