

CEJS Faculty Grant Mid-Year Report

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Working Title: Social Justice and Measuring Environmental Benefit

The purpose of my grant was to expand a line of reasoning that I first developed in two brief publications which criticized recent environmental theorists who argue that in order to meet its environmental obligations the United States of America must reduce immigration and tie foreign aid to family planning initiatives. I claimed that these arguments failed to show that these policies would help the U.S.A. meet its environmental obligations for two reasons: (1) climate change must be tackled through international cooperation and (2) these policy recommendations have the potential to undermine the diplomatic relationships on which the U.S.A.'s ability to enter international agreements depends. In short, I argued that even if these proposals could be shown to reduce urban sprawl and greenhouse gas emissions, their advocates cannot claim that they are environmentally beneficial without also showing that these policies do not undermine international environmental treaty-making.

During the summer of 2015, my grant funded two research projects aimed at broadening my criticism. First, I studied the work of Scott Barrett and other international relations theorists who show that agreements designed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions are substantially different from other environmental agreements, in part because it is in an individual country's short-term economic interests to avoid reducing emissions. Second, I explored the writings of Paul Erhlich, Anne Erhlich, and Garrett Hardin who argued during the 1960s and 1970s that environmental obligations could be met only by curtailing reproductive freedoms and decreasing foreign aid to countries that were ecologically unsustainable. In my final paper, I will argue that the Erhlichs, Hardin, and the contemporary theorists mentioned above rely on a similar argument form, which can be generalized in the following way: a widely-held belief about a person's moral due or a government's humanitarian obligations (such as reproductive freedoms or a wealthy country's responsibility to alleviate global hunger) is indefensible on the grounds that putting it into practice leads to a significant environmental harm. The goal of my final paper will be to show that this argument fails because it rests on an inadequate understanding of how to measure the environmental benefit of a public policy proposal. I argue that the true environmental benefit of a public policy proposal can only be measured if we take into account the proposal's likely implications for future environmental treaty-making. Of course, predicting whether a policy will

decrease greenhouse gas emissions or reduce toxic waste may be easier than predicting whether a policy will undermine or strengthen the diplomatic ties that are necessary for successful international cooperation. However, I will argue that whenever policy proposals violate widely-held beliefs about social justice, there are good reasons to believe that these policies will undermine international cooperation.

Since the summer, my research has been focused on the work of John Broome, a philosopher and economist who worked on the IPCC's fifth Assessment Report. In the final version of paper, my plan is to use a modified version of his method for analyzing the potential costs and benefits of emissions-reduction policy proposals, in order to develop a framework for assessing the environmental costs of ignoring social justice.