

The Environmental Argument for Immigration Restrictions: A Critique

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Egalitarians have good reasons to care about both climate change and migration. The impacts of climate change tend to fall hardest on those who are already amongst the worst-off, exacerbating inequality and entrenching poverty.¹ Immigration restrictions in high-income states lock the worst-off out of opportunities to increase their income, wealth, and wellbeing.² Those concerned by global inequality thus tend to advocate both aggressive climate mitigation policies and less restrictive immigration policies in high-income states.³

But what if these two goals conflict? One possible concern about migration from low- to high-income states is that it increases the population of high-emitting states, thereby increasing greenhouse gas emissions and hindering the project of climate mitigation. If this is correct, it suggests that there may be a conflict between the egalitarian goals of loosening immigration restrictions in high-income states and taking aggressive action to mitigate climate change. What should egalitarians make of this apparent conflict?

The *environmental argument for immigration restrictions* suggests that high-income states ought to restrict immigration in order to promote environmental goals such as mitigating climate change.⁴ In this chapter, I critically assess the environmental argument for immigration

¹ IPCC, “Summary for Policymakers,” in *Climate Change 2023: Synthesis Report. Contribution of Working Groups I, II and III to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*, eds. Core Writing Team, Hoesung Lee and José Romero (IPCC, 2023), 5.

² Branko Milanovic, *Global Inequality: A New Approach for the Age of Globalization* (Harvard University Press, 2016), 118–54; see also Gordon H. Hanson, “The Economic Consequences of the Migration of Labor,” *American Economic Review* 1, no. 1 (2009): 179–208; Michael A. Clemens, Claudio E. Montenegro, and Lant Pritchett, “The Place Premium: Bounding the Price Equivalent of Migration Barriers,” *The Review of Economics and Statistics* 101, no. 2 (2019): 201–13.

³ For climate mitigation, see Darrel Moellendorf, *Mobilizing Hope: Climate Change and Global Poverty* (Oxford University Press, 2022); Simon Caney, “Climate Change and the Duties of the Advantaged,” *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy* 13, no. 1 (2010): 203–38; Henry Shue, *Climate Justice: Vulnerability and Protection* (Oxford University Press, 2014). For immigration, see Joseph Carens, *The Ethics of Immigration* (Oxford University Press, 2013), 233–36; Darrel Moellendorf, *Cosmopolitan Justice* (Routledge, 2002), 61–67; Nils Holtug, “Global Equality and Open Borders,” in *Oxford Studies in Political Philosophy Volume 6*, eds. David Sobel, Peter Vallentyne, and Steven Wall (Oxford University Press, 2020).

⁴ Different versions of this argument include Philip Cafaro and Winthrop Staples III, “The Environmental Argument for Reducing Immigration into the United States,” *Environmental Ethics* 31, no. 1 (2009): 5–30; Philip Cafaro, *How Many is Too Many? The Progressive Argument for Reducing Immigration into the United States* (University of Chicago Press, 2015), 105–76; Robert H. Chapman, “Immigration and Environment: Setting the Moral Boundaries,” *Environmental Values* 9, no. 2

restrictions. First, I distinguish between several different versions of the environmental argument and reconstruct the most plausible version of it (§1). Next, I clarify the empirical basis of the environmental argument (§2). Then, I examine three counterarguments to the environmental argument: first, that migration-related emissions ought to be treated as special when it comes to climate mitigation (§3); second, that it is inconsistent to promote human development abroad and restrictive immigration policies at home (§4); and third, that high-emitting states cannot appeal to environmental arguments as a justification for exclusion (§5). I argue that the first counterargument fails, that the second is partially successful, and that the third counterargument is successful. The upshot is that egalitarians concerned about climate change need not advocate for restrictive immigration policies in high-income states.

Before making these arguments, it is worth making three clarificatory remarks. First is that my focus in this chapter is on the consequences of migration for climate change, not the consequences of climate change for migration. The impacts of climate change interact with patterns of migration and displacement in empirically and morally complex ways, which raise important questions of justice that I have explored in greater detail elsewhere.⁵ Here, I focus instead on the impacts of migration from low- to high-income states on climate mitigation.

Second is that in this chapter I attempt to engage with the environmental argument in its most plausible form. In political debates, the environmental argument is often made in bad faith by those who cloak their nativism in an environmentalist garb. Across Europe, political parties on the far right are increasingly attempting to weaponize environmental issues to bolster anti-immigrant sentiment.⁶ And even within mainstream environmental movements, there have always been those whose environmentalism is intertwined with anti-immigrant hostility.⁷ But the environmental argument for immigration restrictions is also made in good faith by those who take there to be a genuine trade-off between openness to immigration and environmental protection. It is worth engaging with this argument at its best, to show why those genuinely committed to tackling climate change need not endorse restrictive immigration policies.

(2000): 189–209; and David Miller, *Strangers in Our Midst: The Political Philosophy of Immigration* (Harvard University Press, 2016), 65–66.

⁵ Jamie Draper, *Climate Displacement* (Oxford University Press, 2023); Jamie Draper, “Climate Change and Displacement: Towards a Pluralist Approach,” *European Journal of Political Theory* 23, no. 1 (2024): 44–64.

⁶ Joe Turner and Dan Bailey, “‘Ecobordering’: Casting Immigration Control as Environmental Protection,” *Environmental Politics* 31, no. 1 (2021): 110–31.

⁷ See John Hultgren, *Border Walls Gone Green: Nature and Anti-Immigrant Politics in America* (University of Minnesota Press, 2015).

Third is that I engage here with the environmental argument as it is directed towards egalitarians. Although it presents a challenge to anyone who favours more open immigration policies, the environmental argument—or at least the version of it that I focus on—presents an especially important challenge for egalitarians because it appeals to commitments that they already share. Egalitarians who seek to improve the position of the globally worst-off argue that this goal provides a good reason to loosen immigration restrictions in high-income states. But if the environmental argument is successful, then it shows that this commitment to global equality actually speaks *against*, rather than in favour of, loosening immigration restrictions in high-income states.

1. The Environmental Argument for Immigration Restrictions

The most explicit defence of the environmental argument for immigration restrictions is made by Philip Cafaro and Winthrop Staples III.⁸ Cafaro and Staples focus on restricting immigration to the USA, but I reconstruct their argument in more general (and simplified) terms here. As we will see, there are several versions of the environmental argument. But the argument has a common core, which can be set out as follows:

- P1. Immigration is a significant cause of population growth in high-income states.
- P2. Population growth in high-income states is a significant cause of environmental degradation.
- P3. We have a moral duty to reduce environmental degradation.
- C. Therefore, we have a moral duty to reduce immigration to high-income states.⁹

At first glance, this argument appears to provide reasonable grounds for immigration restrictions. The first two premises are at least facially plausible empirical claims, which I examine more closely in the next section. The third premise is a normative premise, which appeals to a moral duty that we can expect to be accepted by egalitarians. Cafaro and Staples suggest that the argument rests only “on a straightforward commitment to mainstream environmentalism, easily confirmed empirical premises, and logic.”¹⁰

⁸ Philip Cafaro and Winthrop Staples III, “The Environmental Argument for Reducing Immigration into the United States,” *Environmental Ethics* 31, no. 1 (2009): 5–30.

⁹ Cafaro and Staples, 5–6. If we want to allow for the possibility that countervailing reasons could outweigh environmental reasons, then strictly speaking the conclusion of the argument should refer to a *pro tanto* moral duty, but Cafaro and Staples do not restrict their argument in this way.

¹⁰ Cafaro and Staples, 6.

Before evaluating this argument, it is worth examining P3, its key normative premise, in greater detail. A ‘moral duty to reduce environmental degradation’ could be understood in multiple ways. Clarifying this duty reveals that there are several different versions of the environmental argument for immigration restrictions, and allows us to identify the version of the argument that presents the most significant challenge for egalitarians.

One distinction between different versions of the environmental argument concerns the *scope* of P3. The duty to reduce environmental degradation could apply specifically to environmental degradation within the receiving society, or it could apply to environmental degradation throughout the world. We can call the former version of the argument the *local* argument for immigration restrictions, and the latter the *global* argument for immigration restrictions. In one part of their discussion, Cafaro and Staples make the local argument for immigration restrictions: they argue that the US government should restrict immigration because immigration increases urban sprawl and consequent habitat destruction within the USA.¹¹ In another part of their discussion, they make the global argument for immigration restrictions, focusing on the role that immigration-related population growth plays in the USA’s contributions to global climate change.¹² David Miller also makes a version of the global argument.¹³ He suggests that high-income states ought to restrict immigration as part of their efforts to tackle climate change, because “immigrants who adopt Western lifestyles will consume more and induce more carbon emissions through their demand for energy” such that “migration is likely to be bad news for the planet overall.”¹⁴

Another distinction concerns the different possible *grounds* for P3, the duty to reduce environmental degradation. Why do we have a duty to reduce environmental degradation? One answer to this question is that we have such a duty because of the negative (and unevenly distributed) consequences of environmental degradation for other *humans*, including future generations of humans. On this view, the duty to reduce environmental degradation is continuous with other duties of distributive justice, in that it concerns the fair distribution of (environmental) benefits and burdens within human communities. Another answer to this question is that we have a duty to reduce environmental degradation because of the negative consequences of environmental degradation for *non-human* entities such as non-human animals, species, or ecosystems. On this view, our duty to reduce environmental degradation

¹¹ Cafaro and Staples, 9–11.

¹² Cafaro and Staples, 11–12.

¹³ Miller, *Strangers in Our Midst*, 65–66.

¹⁴ Miller, 66.

is part of a broader ecological ethic that treats some non-human entities as bearers of intrinsic value or subjects of moral concern. We can call the former version of the argument the *environmental* argument for immigration restrictions and the latter version the *ecological* argument for immigration restrictions.¹⁵ Cafaro and Staples say relatively little about the grounds of their argument, except that they take the duty to reduce environmental degradation to follow from a commitment to mainstream environmentalism. But when they do reflect on this commitment, they refer most clearly to the ecological argument, arguing that environmentalism involves a commitment to “generous sustainability” which includes the goal of “sharing the landscape generously with non-human beings.”¹⁶ They do, however, suggest that their argument can also be endorsed by those who hold anthropocentric views, on the basis that migration has negative environmental consequences for “future generations in the United States and abroad.”¹⁷ And in other work defending immigration restrictions, Cafaro has based his argument on the claim that “justice demands vigorous action from this current generation of Americans to prevent potentially catastrophic climate change...for ourselves and our children, for the sake of the world’s poorest people, for future generations.”¹⁸

These possible interpretations of the P3 allows us to distinguish between four versions of the environmental argument for immigration restrictions: the *local-ecological* argument, the *global-ecological* argument, the *local-environmental* argument, and the *global-environmental* argument. The local-ecological argument concerns the environmental impact of immigration on non-human entities within the receiving society. The global-ecological argument concerns the environmental impact of immigration on non-human entities throughout the world. The local-environmental argument concerns the environmental impact of immigration on the interests of humans within the receiving society. And the global-environmental argument concerns the environmental impact of immigration on the interests of humans globally.

I take the global-environmental argument to be the strongest version of the environmental argument, so it will be the primary target of my critique. The global-environmental argument presents a particular challenge to egalitarians, since it says that immigration restrictions in high-income states are justified because such restrictions are an important way of protecting the interests of those who are most vulnerable to climate impacts.

¹⁵ For this distinction, see David Schlosberg, *Defining Environmental Justice: Theories, Practices, Movements* (Oxford University Press, 2007), 3–8.

¹⁶ Cafaro and Staples, 15.

¹⁷ Cafaro and Staples, 16 n19.

¹⁸ Cafaro, *How Many is Too Many?* 161.

And those who are most vulnerable to climate impacts are, by and large, the globally worst-off. The local and ecological versions of the argument, by contrast, are less plausible candidates for a successful environmental argument for immigration restrictions.

The local argument evaluates immigration policies only in terms of their impacts on the receiving society. But why should we restrict our focus in this way? Advocates of the local argument need to claim that—at least when it comes to environmental degradation—the interests of those (humans or non-human entities) within the receiving society should be prioritised over those abroad. For their part, Cafaro and Staples appear to endorse the local argument, in both its ecological and environmental variants. They “plead guilty to a special concern for America’s wildlife and wetlands” and suggest that “environmentalism necessarily involves love, connection and efforts to protect particular places.”¹⁹ They also argue that an additional (though non-environmental) reason to restrict immigration is that it has negative economic consequences for the worst-off within the receiving society.²⁰ But claims like these are likely to be controversial, especially for those who would otherwise favour more open immigration policies because of their effects on global inequality. The assumption that the (human or non-human) inhabitants of the receiving society should have a moral priority imposes a significant justificatory burden on the local argument and makes it less promising as an argument for immigration restrictions that is directed at egalitarians.

The ecological argument presupposes a non-anthropocentric ethic, according to which non-human entities such as non-human animals, species, and ecosystems have moral status or intrinsic value. Cafaro and Staples suggest that some such non-anthropocentric ethic “captures the core of environmentalism,” though they leave the precise content of this ethic unspecified.²¹ A more minimal version of this ethic might attribute moral status to some non-human animals, whilst a broader version would attribute moral status or intrinsic value ecological wholes such as species and ecosystems. Different versions of this ethic will be more and less controversial,

¹⁹ Cafaro and Staples, 25.

²⁰ Cafaro and Staples, 21, 28. In support of the empirical part of this claim, Cafaro and Staples refer to George Borjas, *Heaven’s Door: Immigration Policy and the American Economy* (Princeton University Press, 1999). But Borjas’s view by no means represents the consensus view amongst economists. For an alternative, see David Card, “Immigration and Inequality,” *American Economic Review* 99, no. 2 (2009): 1–21. For a good parsing of the empirical literature and its relevance for philosophical arguments about immigration restrictions, see Anna Stilz, “Economic Migration: On What Terms?” *Perspectives on Politics* 20, no. 3 (2022): 983–98.

²¹ Cafaro and Staples, 15–16. Cafaro and Staples refer to a number of authors whose views suggest a broad interpretation of this non-anthropocentric ethic, including those of Holmes Rolston III, J. Baird Callicott, Bryan Norton, Arne Næss, Karen Warren, Val Plumwood, and Ronald Sandler.

and some egalitarians will accept that the interests of non-human entities should count when it comes to global justice.²² But the claim involved in the ecological argument is not only that the interests of non-human entities *count*, but moreover that those interests can override important human interests, such as the interests that would be served through migration policies that improve the position of the globally worst-off.²³ Like the local argument, the ecological argument thus also requires us to accept claims that are likely to be controversial amongst those who would typically favour more open immigration policies because of the role that they can play in improving the position of the worst-off.

The global-environmental version of the environmental argument for immigration restrictions avoids both of these sets of controversial assumptions. It does not assume any priority for local (human or non-human) victims of environmental degradation, nor does it assume any controversial theory of moral status or intrinsic value that suggests that the interests of non-human entities can outweigh the interests of humans. It is entirely consistent with an anthropocentric, cosmopolitan egalitarianism. This makes it a particularly promising argument in the context of debates with those who otherwise endorse open immigration policies as a way of reducing global inequalities.

2. Migration, Population Growth, and Climate Change

The environmental argument for immigration restrictions claims that migration from low- to high-income states, because it leads to population growth in the receiving society, has negative environmental consequences. In the global-environmental argument, the relevant negative consequences are increased greenhouse gas emissions, which aggravate the threat of climate change to important human interests. None of the arguments that I consider in this chapter reject this empirical claim, but it is nonetheless important to clarify the relationship between migration, population growth, and climate change within the environmental argument.

²² See, for example, Darrel Moellendorf, *Mobilizing Hope: Climate Change and Global Poverty* (Oxford University Press, 2022), 199–201; *The Moral Challenge of Dangerous Climate Change: Values, Poverty, and Policy* (Cambridge University Press, 2014), 59–61.

²³ This makes the claim involved in the ecological argument closer to something like Holmes Rolston III's controversial claim that saving nature should sometimes take priority over feeding the poor. See Holmes Rolston III, "Feeding People versus Saving Nature?" in *World Hunger and Morality*, eds. William Aiken and Hugh LaFollette (Prentice-Hall, 1996), 248–67. For critiques of Rolston's view, see Robin Attfield, "Saving Nature, Feeding People, and Ethics," *Environmental Values* 7, no. 3 (1998): 291–304; Alan Carter, "Saving Nature and Feeding People," *Environmental Ethics* 26, no. 4 (2004): 339–60.

One classic formula for determining environmental impact is the IPAT formula, which treats environmental impact (I) as a function of population (P), affluence (or consumption) (A), and technological development (T).²⁴ The IPAT formula offers an intuitive explanation of the role of population growth in environmental degradation: if population levels increase whilst levels of affluence and technological development remain the same, then we can expect overall environmental impact to increase. Population acts as a multiplier for the environmental impact of consumption at a given level of technological development. The IPAT equation is certainly not perfect. For one thing, its variables are not independent of each other. The pace of technological development, for example, is itself affected by the dynamics of economic growth.²⁵ For another, its variables may not affect environmental impact in the way that the formula predicts. For example, technological development might induce increases in consumption that offset efficiency savings, or increases in affluence above a threshold may reduce rather than increase environmental impact.²⁶ Still, despite these issues, the IPAT equation is a useful heuristic, and helps us to get a better picture of the roles that migration and population growth may play in climate change.

Migration itself does not create more people, and so it does not affect population growth directly. It may have an *indirect* effect on population growth, if migration changes fertility behaviour such that migrants (or their children) have more or fewer children than they would otherwise have. But when it comes to the fertility behaviour of immigrants, the evidence suggests that fertility rates tend to decline amongst migrants who move to high-income states and their children, converging over time with lower fertility rates amongst non-immigrants.²⁷

²⁴ The *locus classicus* is Paul R. Ehrlich and John P. Holdren, “A Bulletin Dialogue on “The Closing Circle”: Critique,” *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 28, no. 5 (1972): 16–27.

²⁵ For the significance of this in the context of climate change, see Kenneth Gillingham, Richard G. Newell, and William A. Pizer, “Modelling Endogenous Technological Change for Climate Policy Analysis,” *Energy Economics* 30, no. 6 (2008): 2734–53.

²⁶ The former idea is referred to as the “Jevons Paradox” or the “rebound effect”; see Richard York and Julius Alexander McGee, “Understanding the Jevons Paradox,” *Environmental Sociology* 2, no. 1 (2016): 77–87. The latter idea is referred to as the “environmental Kuznets curve”; see Gene M. Grossman and Alan B. Kreuger, “Economic Growth and the Environment,” *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 110, no. 2 (1995): 353–77. Evidence for the environmental Kuznets curve appears to be mixed at best when it comes to CO₂ emissions; see Marzio Galeotti, Alessandro Lanza, and Francesco Pauli, “Reassessing the Environmental Kuznets Curve for CO₂ Emissions: A Robustness Exercise,” *Ecological Economics* 57, no. 1 (2006): 152–63.

²⁷ Jochen Mayer and Regina T. Riphahn, “Fertility Assimilation of Immigrants: Evidence from Data Count Models,” *Journal of Population Economics* 13, no. 2 (2000): 241–61; Holger Stichnoth and Mustafa Yeter, “Cultural Influences on the Fertility Behavior of First- and Second-Generation Immigrants,” *Journal of Demographic Economics* 82, no. 3 (2016): 281–314.

If anything, this suggests that—other things being equal—we should expect migration from low- to high-income to *reduce* rather than increase global population, although demographers typically stress that other factors such as women’s educational attainment and access to contraception are much more important than migration.²⁸

When we talk about population growth resulting from immigration, then, we are not talking about *absolute* population growth at the global level. Rather, we are talking about *relative* population growth within the receiving society. The central problem with migration from low- to high-income states, according to the environmental argument, is that it increases the size of the population in places where greenhouse gas emissions are already high. The inhabitants of high-income states consume environmental resources at an unsustainable rate, by emitting more than their fair share of the greenhouse gases than can be safely absorbed into the Earth’s atmosphere without leading to dangerous climate impacts. Migration from low- to high-income states increases their share of the global population, thus increasing overall emissions and aggravating the problem of climate change. Restrictive immigration policies in high-income states, so the argument goes, would reduce the number of people who are emitting too much, by limiting population growth in high-income states.

The empirical relationship that is ultimately important from the point of view of the environmental argument is thus the relationship between migration from low- to high-income states and overall greenhouse gas emissions. There is relatively little work that focuses directly on this relationship, but one recent analysis does provide suggestive evidence of a link, finding that the CO₂ emissions attributable to international migrants increased by 65% in the period from 1995–2015, whilst global emissions rose by roughly 33% in the same period.²⁹ The authors of the study hypothesise that the best explanation for this is that those who migrate from poorer to richer states tend to change their lifestyles, and their consumption of goods such as housing, infrastructure, and healthcare will tend to have a greater CO₂-intensity.³⁰ This evidence is certainly not conclusive, but for the purposes of the arguments that I develop here, I will accept the empirical claim that migration from low- to high-income states will tend to increase greenhouse gas emissions overall.

²⁸ Stein Emil Vollset et al., “Fertility, Mortality, Migration, and Population Scenarios for 195 Countries and Territories from 2017 to 2100: a Forecasting Analysis for the Global Burden of Disease Study,” *The Lancet* 396, no. 10258 (2020): 1285–1306. There may be offsetting factors that affect overall population levels, such as differences in life expectancies in low- and high-income states.

²⁹ Sia Liang et al., “CO₂ Emissions Embodied in International Migration from 1995–2015,”

Environmental Science & Technology 54, no. 19 (2020): 12530–38.

³⁰ Liang et al., 12535

There are, however, two qualifications that are worth adding to this empirical claim. The first is that there is some evidence to suggest that immigrants tend to have a lower environmental impact than non-immigrants, with studies finding lower rates of CO₂ and N₂O emissions or air pollution in areas with a higher share of immigrants (though it is not entirely clear if this is because immigrants make different consumption choices or simply because they tend to be worse off than non-immigrants).³¹ These findings suggest that population growth in high-income states due to migration may have a weaker effect on greenhouse gas emissions than equivalent ‘natural’ population growth. If they are correct, then their implication is that the environmental consequences of migration are likely to be less pronounced than the environmental argument suggests. But this qualification does not undermine the empirical basis of the environmental argument. Even if immigrants emit less than non-immigrants, they may still emit more than they would have otherwise emitted at home, so migration from low- to high-income states may still increase greenhouse gas emissions overall.

The second is that the impact of migration on climate *mitigation* is only part of the story, since migration from low- to high-income states may also play a role in *adaptation* to climate change. When it comes to tackling climate change, another strategy besides reducing climate impacts through mitigation is making those impacts less harmful through adaptation. Elsewhere, I have argued that international migration can, at least in some circumstances, function as an effective and just strategy of adaptation to climate change, because of the role that remittances can play in promoting climate resilience amongst those who remain behind.³² Recent empirical work by Hélène Benveniste, Michael Oppenheimer and Marc Fleurbaey also suggests that restrictive immigration policies can exacerbate vulnerability to climate change by keeping people trapped in places where they face greater exposure to climate impacts.³³ Although I do not pursue this line of argument further here, a full accounting of the effects of migration on climate change would need to take into account the adaptive benefits of migration, as well as any costs that it creates in terms of hindering climate mitigation.

³¹ Guizhen Ma and Erin Trough Hoffman, “Population, Immigration, and Air Quality in the USA: A Spatial Panel Study,” *Population and Environment* 40, no. 3 (2019): 283–302; Jay Squalli, “Disentangling the Relationship Between Immigration and Environmental Emissions,” *Population and Environment* 43, no. 1 (2021): 1–21.

³² Draper, *Climate Displacement*, 86–105; see also Jamie Draper, “Labor Migration and Climate Change Adaptation,” *American Political Science Review* 116, no. 3 (2022): 1012–24.

³³ Hélène Benveniste, Michael Oppenheimer and Marc Fleurbaey, “Effect of Border Policy on Exposure and Vulnerability to Climate Change,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 117, no. 43 (2020): 26692–702.

What should we take from this clarification of the empirical basis of the environmental argument? There are two important points to draw out for our purposes. First is that population growth in high-income states only matters, from an environmental point of view, because of high levels of emissions within receiving societies. Immigration from low- to high-income states does not increase population levels overall, and so it would not be an environmental issue were it not for high emissions within receiving societies.

Second is that there are other levers apart from population that we can pull in mitigating climate change. High-income states' contributions to climate change are a consequence not only of their population sizes, but also of their levels of consumption and technological development. These states can also reduce their contributions to climate change by reducing consumption, by increasing technological development, or through some combination of both.

Our view about which (combination of) levers we can or should pull in mitigating climate change will depend on a host of highly contested moral and empirical claims about the population, consumption, and technology. Darrel Moellendorf, for example, argues that we should focus on technology, partly because he is optimistic about technological development and partly because of a moral concern that reducing consumption in high-income states will have knock-on effects that exacerbate global poverty.³⁴ Henry Shue argues against betting on at least some forms of technological development because doing so involves shifting the burden of risk between present and future generations.³⁵ Advocates of degrowth who are sceptical about technological development typically stress the importance of reducing consumption.³⁶ There are deep disagreements here, including not only moral disagreements, but also empirical and theoretical disagreements about whether there are necessary limits to economic growth or technological development (and, if so, where exactly those limits lie).³⁷

³⁴ Moellendorf, *Mobilizing Hope*, 140–51; Daniel Callies and Darrel Moellendorf, “Assessing Climate Policies: Catastrophe Avoidance and the Right to Sustainable Development,” *Politics, Philosophy & Economics* 20, no. 2 (2021): 127–50. For an even more optimistic view, see Joseph Heath, *Philosophical Foundations of Climate Change Policy* (Oxford University Press, 2021), 63–108.

³⁵ Shue makes this argument with respect to Bioenergy with Carbon Capture and Storage (BECCS) technologies. See Henry Shue, “Climate Dreaming: Negative Emissions, Risk Transfer, and Irreversibility,” *Journal of Human Rights and the Environment* 8, no. 2 (2017): 203–16.

³⁶ For example, Tim Jackson, *Prosperity Without Growth: Foundations for the Economy of Tomorrow* (Routledge, 2017), esp. 84–102; Jason Hickel and Giorgos Kallis, “Is Green Growth Possible?” *New Political Economy* 25, no. 4 (2020): 469–86. For a related discussion, see also Lucas Stanczyk's contribution to this volume.

³⁷ For an analysis of these disagreements, especially as they arise in ecological and environmental economics, see Mark Sagoff. “Carrying Capacity and Ecological Economics,” *BioScience* 45, no. 9 (1995): 610–20.

For their part, Cafaro and Staples argue that *both* population growth and consumption should be reduced within high-income states, though they say relatively little about technological development.³⁸ It is worth making two points about this position. The first is that population growth is *already* declining in high-income states. In 2021, the US population growth rate was 0.3%, a figure which has been steadily declining since 1992. The US's fertility rate in 2021 was 1.66, well below the estimated fertility replacement rate of roughly 2.1.³⁹ Like other advanced industrialised economies, the US has undergone a "demographic transition" as birth and mortality rates both decrease over time.⁴⁰ With current levels of migration, the US's population is growing slowly, and the growth rate is falling. If migration were restricted, then US population levels would significantly decline overall. So, although they talk about preventing population *growth*, Cafaro and Staples's argument is better understood as the claim that we should significantly *reduce* population levels in high-income states.⁴¹

Second is that reducing population levels within high-income states only makes sense as a mitigation strategy if emissions within those states remain higher than can be sustained at a global level. Cafaro and Staples argue that "if high consumption is a problem, population growth must be, too."⁴² But by the same token, if relative population growth within high-income societies (rather than absolute population growth at the global level) is a problem, this can only be because emissions within those societies remain too high. If the inhabitants of high-income states were to emit at a globally sustainable rate, then there would be no need to reduce their relative share of the global population in order to tackle climate change.

As we will see, these points are important when it comes to justifying immigration restrictions. With the relationship between migration, population growth, and climate change clarified, we can turn to three counterarguments to the environmental argument for immigration restrictions. The first counterargument suggests that migration-related emissions ought to enjoy a special status within climate mitigation; the second suggests that it is inconsistent to promote immigration restrictions and development abroad; and the third suggests that high-emitting states cannot appeal to environmental reasons to exclude would-be immigrants.

³⁸ Cafaro and Staples, 12, 23.

³⁹ This data is drawn from Hannah Ritchie et al., "Population Growth" (2023), available at <https://ourworldindata.org/population-growth> (accessed 4 May 2024) and Max Roser, "Fertility Rate" (2024), available at <https://ourworldindata.org/fertility-rate> (accessed 4 May 2024).

⁴⁰ Dudley Kirk, "Demographic Transition Theory," *Population Studies* 50, no. 3 (1996): 316–87.

⁴¹ Cafaro and Staples, 14-15.

⁴² Cafaro and Staples, 23.

3. Is Migration Special?

Philosophers working on population and climate change have tended to focus on population growth via procreation, not immigration.⁴³ But their arguments could be extended to migration. Ingrid Robeyns has recently argued that procreation ought to enjoy a special status compared to other emissions-generating activities.⁴⁴ Robeyns argues against what she calls the “moral equivalence thesis”—the claim that procreation is “morally on a par” with consumption—and defends the claim that procreation ought to enjoy a special status in our response to the climate crisis.⁴⁵ If Robeyns is right, then we might extend her argument: perhaps migration *also* ought to enjoy a special status when it comes to tackling the climate crisis.

Robeyns makes two arguments. The first argument is that we should view “procreative parenting” as a minimal capability that ought to be socially guaranteed in our response to the climate crisis rather than as a mere preference.⁴⁶ Robeyns argues that we should first ensure that each person is guaranteed a minimal set of valuable capabilities, and only then distribute any remaining emissions entitlements for mere preferences fairly between persons. If we accept this view, and if we accept that the capability of procreative parenting should fall within this minimal set, then emissions from procreative parenting and emissions from consumption activities such as flying for leisure travel would not be morally equivalent.⁴⁷ The capability of procreative parenting (the opportunity to have at least one child, but not necessarily more, on Robeyns’s view) would be protected within climate mitigation.

Robeyns’s second argument is the “argument from human self-understanding,” which says that the opportunity to procreate is part of what it means to be a human.⁴⁸ This argument depends on a comprehensive interpretation of what it means to live well as a human, which involves understanding humans as “a species that procreates and has developed many social practices and traditions that give meaning to parenting and kinship.”⁴⁹ If successful, it suggests

⁴³ See, for example, Elizabeth Cripps, “Climate Change, Population, and Justice: Hard Choices to Avoid Tragic Choices,” *Global Justice: Theory, Practice, Rhetoric* 8, no. 1 (2015): 1–22; Clare Heyward, “A Growing Problem? Dealing With Population Increases in Climate Justice,” *Ethical Perspectives* 19, no. 4 (2012): 703–32.

⁴⁴ Ingrid Robeyns, “Is Procreation Special?” *Journal of Value Inquiry* 56, no. 4 (2022): 643–61.

⁴⁵ Robeyns, 643–44. For a defence of the moral equivalence thesis, see Thomas Young, “Overconsumption and Procreation: Are They Morally Equivalent?” *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 18, no. 2 (2001): 183–92.

⁴⁶ Robeyns, 648–56.

⁴⁷ Robeyns, 654–56.

⁴⁸ Robeyns, 656–59.

⁴⁹ Robeyns, 657.

that procreation is a matter of seeing ourselves as human, such that being denied the opportunity to procreate (at least once, but not necessarily more than once) amounts to dehumanization. It suggests that in our response to the climate crisis, we have special reason to protect procreation, but not mere consumption, since being denied opportunities for procreation is dehumanizing.⁵⁰

Could these arguments be extended to the case of migration? If so, then this would provide a strong counterargument to the environmental argument for immigration restrictions. It would suggest that rather than focusing on reducing the population of high-income states by restricting immigration, we should instead focus on reducing consumption or increasing technological development. But my suggestion is that whatever their prospects for the case of procreation, neither of these arguments provides the basis for a successful response to the environmental argument for immigration restrictions.

On the first argument, the important question for our purposes is whether migration should be included in the minimal set of valuable capabilities that enjoy a protected status in our response to the climate crisis. Migration can certainly be understood as a capability, and it is often a valuable one.⁵¹ As egalitarians have pointed out, migration is often instrumentally valuable as a means of achieving further goods and opportunities, such as access to jobs or education. Since migration, especially from low- to high-income states, can create significant opportunities, it may even be what Jo Wolff and Avner de Shalit refer to as a “fertile functioning.”⁵² And beyond its instrumental value, the opportunity to migrate may also be non-instrumentally valuable. Those who undertake what Valeria Ottonelli and Tiziana Torresi call a “migration project” view the opportunity to migrate abroad and acquire new experiences as an important part of their life-plan, independently of its instrumental benefits.⁵³

But even if migration is a valuable capability, this does not mean that it should be counted amongst the minimal set of capabilities that ought to be guaranteed as a matter of distributive justice. The instrumental value of migration from low- to high-income states suggests that our primary goal should not be to protect migration *itself* within our climate

⁵⁰ Robeyns, 658.

⁵¹ For a capabilities view of migration, see Hein de Haas, “A Theory of Migration: The Aspirations-Capabilities Framework,” *Comparative Migration Studies* 9, 8 (2021). Strictly speaking, migration itself is a *functioning*, whilst the effective ability or opportunity to engage in migration is its corresponding *capability*. For this distinction, see Ingrid Robeyns, *Wellbeing, Freedom, and Social Justice: The Capability Approach Re-Examined* (Open Book Publishers, 2017), 38–41.

⁵² Jonathan Wolff and Avner de Shalit, *Disadvantage* (Oxford University Press, 2007), [XX].

⁵³ Valeria Ottonelli and Tiziana Torresi, “Inclusivist Egalitarian Liberalism and Temporary Migration: A Dilemma,” *Journal of Political Philosophy* 20, no. 2 (2012): 202–24.

mitigation efforts, but rather to ensure that the worst-off have access to the opportunities for which migration from low- to high-income states is often instrumental.⁵⁴ Access to good jobs and education ought to be protected in our response to the climate crisis, but as we will see in the next section, there may be other ways of providing access to these goods besides migration.

The fact that migration is non-instrumentally valuable for some also does not show that it should be protected as a basic capability. After all, there are many other emissions-generating activities which may be non-instrumentally valuable for their participants that we may not want to treat as special, such as consuming meat or flying for leisure travel. To show that migration is special, we would need to show that the opportunity to migrate is sufficiently important that it should be socially guaranteed as a matter of what we owe each other.⁵⁵ Some have argued that migration is a human right, which would be one route to this conclusion.⁵⁶ But the claim that migration is a human right is controversial, and so this strategy would impose a significant justificatory burden on our response to the environmental argument. The claim that migration is a human right is also a premise that advocates of the environmental argument are unlikely to accept: if migration were a human right, then the environmental argument would not even get off the ground in the first place. This makes it unwise to hang our response to the environmental argument on the claim that migration is a human right.

The argument from human self-understanding is even less promising as a response to the environmental argument. Perhaps the opportunity to procreate should be viewed as a fundamental part of being treated as a human—I remain agnostic on that question here. But this is much less plausible in the case of migration. It is certainly true that humans are ‘a species that migrates and has developed many social practices and traditions that give meaning to migration.’ But this is much less plausible as an interpretation of what it means to live and be treated as a human. Migration is a central part of many cultures and traditions, but only a small

⁵⁴ For a discussion of immigration and distributive justice that takes this idea as its starting point, see Eric Cavallero, “An Immigration-Pressure Model of Global Distributive Justice,” *Politics, Philosophy & Economics* 5, no. 1 (2006): 97–127.

⁵⁵ Robeyns, 652.

⁵⁶ See Kieran Oberman, “Immigration as a Human Right,” in *Migration in Political Theory: The Ethics of Movement and Membership*, eds. Sarah Fine and Lea Ypi (Oxford University Press, 2016), 32–56. For the contrary view, see David Miller, “Is There a Human Right to Immigrate?” in *Migration in Political Theory: The Ethics of Movement and Membership*, ed. Sarah Fine and Lea Ypi (Oxford University Press, 2016), 11–31.

minority of the global population (around 3.6% in 2022) is an international migrant.⁵⁷ Even in contexts in which migration is relatively unrestricted such as the European Union, rates of international migration remain low. Unlike procreation, the vast majority of people in the world do not engage in international migration. This makes it hard to credibly claim that migration is a central part of human self-understanding. If this were true, it would imply that the vast majority of the global population does not live a characteristically human life.

The argument that migration is special does not provide a successful response to the environmental argument for immigration restrictions. Migration can certainly be a valuable project for those who engage in it, either because of its instrumental benefits or because of its non-instrumental value. But this alone does not suffice to show that it should be treated as special. Migration's instrumental value suggests that the opportunities that it allows the worst-off to access ought to be treated as special within climate mitigation, rather than migration itself. Even if migration is non-instrumentally valuable, this does not suffice to show that it should be protected. And the claim that migration is a central part of human self-understanding strains credibility in the face of the fact that most people do not migrate.

4. Migration and Development

The second counterargument to the environmental argument for immigration restrictions is made by Michael Ball-Blakely, who argues that it is inconsistent to promote immigration restrictions at home and human development abroad.⁵⁸ Ball-Blakely argues that advocates of the environmental argument face a dilemma: either they must reject efforts to promote human development abroad, or they must reject the environmental argument for immigration restrictions. Since few would reject efforts to promote human development, he takes this to give us good reason to reject the environmental argument. My suggestion is that Ball-Blakey's argument is partially successful. Advocates of the environmental argument cannot reject human development efforts without violating egalitarian commitments. But they may be able to escape Ball-Blakely's dilemma, if they can explain why we should be optimistic about climate-friendly development but pessimistic about reducing emissions in high-income states.

⁵⁷ Marie McAuliffe and Anna Triandafyllidou (eds.) *World Migration Report 2022* (International Organization for Migration (IOM), 2021), 21; see also Hein de Haas, *How Migration Really Works* (Viking, 2023), 16–19.

⁵⁸ Michael Ball-Blakely, "Climate Change and Green Borders: Why Closure Won't Save the World," *Philosophy in the Contemporary World* 28, no. 2 (2022): 70–95. For related discussions, see Peter Higgins, *Immigration Justice* (Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 93–96; Chandran Kukathas, *Immigration and Freedom* (Princeton University Press, 2021), 153–55.

Advocates of the environmental argument do typically accept that high-income states should promote human development efforts abroad. And if the environmental argument is to be made in a way that can appeal to egalitarians, then it is important for advocates of the environmental argument to uphold this commitment. Cafaro and Staples accept that high-income states have duties of global justice to the worst-off, but they suggest that these duties should be discharged through development aid, trade policies, and individual charitable donations, rather than through immigration policy.⁵⁹ In this way, they suggest that immigration restrictions can be consistent with the egalitarian goal of eliminating inequality and poverty.

Ball-Blakely argues that it is inconsistent for Cafaro and Staples to promote human development abroad and immigration restrictions at home.⁶⁰ His argument is that efforts to promote human development will *also* lead to an increase in greenhouse gas emissions, as emissions will tend to increase as the worst-off become increasingly affluent. This suggests that if high-income states should restrict immigration for environmental reasons, then they should also avoid investing in human development abroad for environmental reasons. Both migration and development lead to increased greenhouse gas emissions overall. As a result, “immigration and other poverty reduction strategies stand or fall together.”⁶¹ Ball-Blakely goes on to suggest that since we should not reject human development on environmental grounds, we should similarly not endorse immigration restrictions on environmental grounds.⁶²

Ball-Blakely’s argument depends on the empirical claim that efforts to promote human development will lead to increased greenhouse gas emissions, and on the moral claim that high-income states ought to resolve this dilemma by abandoning the environmental argument for immigration restrictions (rather than rejecting human development efforts abroad). Could advocates of the environmental argument push back against either of these claims?

One response to the dilemma that Ball-Blakely poses is simply to bite the bullet and reject the moral claim that high-income states should pursue human development efforts abroad. This is essentially the position taken by Garrett Hardin in what he calls the “lifeboat ethic.”⁶³ But this position amounts to arguing that the worst-off should be sacrificed for the benefit of the better-off: it says that we should prevent the worst-off from accessing the benefits of human development, because their doing so would threaten the ability of the better-off to

⁵⁹ Cafaro and Staples, 22–23.

⁶⁰ Ball-Blakely, “Climate Change and Green Borders.”

⁶¹ Ball-Blakely, 81.

⁶² Ball-Blakely, 82.

⁶³ Garrett Hardin, “Living in a Lifeboat,” *BioScience* 24, no. 10 (1972): 561–68.

maintain their position of advantage. For this reason, the option of biting the bullet will strike many as morally reprehensible. It is also clearly incompatible with the egalitarian commitments that made the environmental argument an important challenge in the first place. So, if advocates of the environmental argument bite the bullet in the face of Ball-Blakely's dilemma, their argument is robbed of any force that it would have against the egalitarian who would otherwise be in favour of less restrictive immigration policies.

What about the empirical claim that promoting human development abroad will lead to increased greenhouse gas emissions? If low-income states follow the same development trajectories as high-income states, then we do have good reason to expect that development will lead to a significant increase in greenhouse gas emissions.⁶⁴ But this development pathway is not inevitable. The most recent Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report suggests that "eradicating extreme poverty, energy poverty, and providing decent living standards in low-emitting countries/regions in the context of achieving sustainable development objectives, in the near term, can be achieved without significant global emissions growth."⁶⁵ Achieving this goal is by no means straightforward, and would require unprecedented forms of global cooperation and investments in climate-resilient development. But it is not inevitable that development will undermine climate mitigation.

However, even if climate-friendly development is possible, this does not save the environmental argument. After all, the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions in high-income states is *also* possible, if those states put in place aggressive climate mitigation policies. If advocates of the environmental argument are willing to be optimistic about climate-friendly development, then they should also be willing to be optimistic about emissions reductions in high-income states. Otherwise, they open themselves up to the objection that their optimism is selective. But optimism about reducing emissions in high-income states would undermine the environmental argument, since migration from low- to high-income states is only an environmental problem if emissions in high-income states remain high.

Advocates of the environmental argument could respond to Ball-Blakely's objection by explaining why we should be pessimistic about bringing down emissions in high-income states but optimistic about climate-friendly development in low-income states. If they could provide a reason for pessimism when it comes to emissions reductions in high-income states that does

⁶⁴ For a discussion of the implications of this for global climate policy, see Moellendorf, *The Moral Challenge of Dangerous Climate Change*, 132–34.

⁶⁵ IPCC, "Summary for Policymakers," 30.

not apply to development in low-income states, then perhaps they could escape Ball-Blakely's dilemma. It is not clear what the prospects are for responding to Ball-Blakely's argument in this way, since at least at first glance it is unclear why we would be optimistic about climate-friendly development but not about emissions reductions in high-income states.⁶⁶ And in the absence of such an explanation, the dilemma does appear to undermine the environmental argument. So, even if it does not provide a conclusive reason to reject the environmental argument, Ball-Blakely's argument does put advocates of the environmental argument on the back foot.

Ball-Blakely's argument that it is inconsistent to advocate for immigration restrictions at home and development abroad is thus partially successful. Advocates of the environmental argument cannot bite the bullet and reject human development efforts without violating egalitarian commitments. They could attempt to reject the empirical basis of Ball-Blakely's argument by arguing that human development need not inevitably lead to increased greenhouse gas emissions. But the problem with this response is that migration from low- to high-income states will not inevitably lead to increased greenhouse gas emissions either, since high-income states could engage in aggressive climate mitigation. Advocates of the environmental argument cannot be pessimistic about migration whilst being optimistic about development, otherwise their pessimism appears selective. Unless they can provide some explanation of why we should be pessimistic about reducing emissions in high-income states but not about climate-friendly development, then Ball-Blakely's provides a reason to reject the environment argument.

5. Climate Change and the Justification of Immigration Restrictions

The final counterargument to the environmental argument for immigration restrictions says that high-emitting states cannot appeal to environmental arguments as a justification for exclusion. This argument starts from the idea that states that exclude owe would-be immigrants a justification for their exclusion. States cannot exclude for any reason whatsoever; they must provide some kind of justification for exclusion to those who they exclude.⁶⁷ And if exclusion is to be justified in terms that are acceptable to egalitarians, then the justification

⁶⁶ Ball-Blakely suggests that, if anything, we have better grounds for optimism about emissions reductions in high-income states than for climate-friendly development, because high-income states have the means to access clean energy technology. Ball-Blakely, "Climate Change and Green Borders," 82.

⁶⁷ See Joseph Carens, *The Ethics of Immigration* (Oxford University Press, 2013), 174–75; Miller, *Strangers in Our Midst*, 104–5; Anna Stilz, *Territorial Sovereignty: A Philosophical Exploration* (Oxford University Press, 2019), 212–13.

must take seriously the interests that would-be immigrants have in migrating to high-income states. The environmental argument aims to supply reasons that can justify the exclusion of would-be immigrants. My suggestion, however, is that states with high per capita emissions cannot appeal to those reasons to justify the exclusion of would-be immigrants.⁶⁸

Anna Stilz has recently developed a model for assessing the justification of immigration restrictions that she calls the “conditional model” of immigration, which provides a useful way of evaluating the environmental argument.⁶⁹ The conditional model aims to balance the interests of would-be immigrants against the possible harms that might arise as a consequence of migration. On this model, states have a duty to permit migration unless such migration would involve significant harms. Stilz focuses on harms to the inhabitants of the receiving society, and argues that states are entitled to give a degree of priority (though not unlimited priority) to the interests of their own members.⁷⁰ The conditional model is thus clearly not strongly egalitarian. But the environmental argument (at least in its global version) appeals to the harms of migration not for the inhabitants of the receiving society, but for those who are harmed by climate impacts more broadly. So, when applied to the environmental argument, the conditional model does not require us to weigh the interests of the receiving state’s inhabitants more heavily than those of would-be immigrants, making it is consistent with egalitarianism.

If we use the conditional model to assess the environmental argument, then one key question for our purposes is whether migration from low- to high-income states is harmful. If migration is not harmful, then states have a duty to permit it, since it serves important interests for would-be immigrants.⁷¹ But if migration is harmful, then states may be permitted to restrict immigration. Not just *any* harm is sufficient to justify exclusion, at least if we understand a ‘harm’ in the broad, non-moralised sense as a mere setback to an interest.⁷² Otherwise, immigration restrictions could be justified whenever migration conflicted with idiosyncratic interests, such as the gourmand’s interest in the existence of a sizeable market for their favourite cuisine, or perhaps even immoral preferences, such as the white nationalist’s preference for

⁶⁸ For related arguments, see Kukathas, *Immigration and Freedom*, 153–55, and Ryan Pevnick, *Immigration and the Constraints of Justice* (Cambridge University Press, 2011), 151–52. Chris Bertram also makes a version of this argument, although he focuses on the exclusion of people whose migration is at least partly driven by climate change (manuscript on file with the author).

⁶⁹ Stilz, *Territorial Sovereignty*, 187–215.

⁷⁰ Stilz, 187–89.

⁷¹ Stilz, 188.

⁷² See Joel Feinberg, *The Moral Limits of Criminal Law, Vol. 1: Harm to Others* (Oxford University Press, 1981), 33–34.

excluding non-whites.⁷³ Instead, Stilz suggests that we should understand harms as “setbacks to certain legitimate moral interests that, as a matter of justice, ought to be protected.”⁷⁴ This would rule out idiosyncratic interests and immoral preferences being used to justify immigration restrictions. As well as being harms in this more robust and moralised sense, harms that justify immigration restrictions cannot be trivial: harms associated with migration need to be sufficiently serious, if they are to outweigh the interests of would-be immigrants and justify immigration restrictions.

The environmental argument does seem to give us good reason to think that migration from low- to high-income states is harmful in this sense. After all, if the empirical premises in the argument are correct, then they suggest that migration will tend to increase greenhouse gas emissions, exacerbating the negative consequences of climate change for the worst-off. The impacts of climate change are clearly significantly harmful to fundamental human interests: they lead to illness and premature death, undermine livelihoods and exacerbate poverty, threaten access to food and water, destroy essential infrastructure and lead to displacement, and more besides.⁷⁵ These impacts disproportionately affect those who are already amongst the worse-off. And the more we emit, the worse those impacts will become over time. So, climate impacts are clearly the right kind of harm to justify immigration restrictions. And as we have already seen, migration from low- to high-income states does appear to increase greenhouse gas emissions overall—or at least, this is a plausible empirical claim that I do not contest here. Advocates of the environmental argument thus appear to have a justification for exclusion that satisfies the conditional model. High-income states can justify exclusion to would-be immigrants by arguing that the predictable consequence of admission would be an increase in greenhouse gas emissions which would, ultimately, lead to significant harms to the worst-off.

The problem with this justification is that not that migration from low- to high-income states does not have harmful consequences. It is rather that the consequences of migration are only harmful because of the actions of the receiving state. Migration from low- to high-income states may well increase overall contributions to climate change. But it does so only because per capita emissions within high-income states remain at a higher level than can be sustained globally. As we saw earlier, migration does not increase population levels overall, only the relative share of the global population within high-income states. This means that if high-

⁷³ I set aside question about whether such preferences could count as genuine interests here.

⁷⁴ Stilz, *Territorial Sovereignty*, 187–88.

⁷⁵ IPCC, “Summary for Policymakers,” 6–7.

income states were to bring down their per capita emissions to a globally sustainable rate, then migration would not have harmful environmental consequences.

In the first instance, this suggests that high-income states ought to adopt climate mitigation policies that make migration less environmentally harmful. If high-income states were to reduce their per capita emissions, then there would be no conflict between the interests of would-be immigrants and the interests of those who are vulnerable to climate change. High-income states have it in their power to *make* migration consistent with tackling climate change, by adopting aggressive climate mitigation policies that bring down their per capita emissions. If it were to do so, then migration would no longer be harmful, and the state would have no longer have any environmental reason to exclude would-be immigrants. In a discussion of economic migration, Stilz suggests that migration may have negative economic consequences for some incumbent residents, but that those costs can be avoided if liberalised immigration policies are paired with the right social and economic policies.⁷⁶ Similarly, in the context of climate change, liberalised immigration policies can be paired with aggressive climate mitigation in order to avoid the environmental harms associated with migration. Egalitarians should thus push high-income states to adopt aggressive climate mitigation policies, not only because such policies limit the negative consequences of climate change for the worst off, but also because such policies make the egalitarian goal of loosening immigration restrictions in high-income states consistent with climate mitigation.

Migration only has harmful environmental consequences because high-income states are *failing* to do what justice requires of them: to radically reduce their per capita emissions.⁷⁷ The environmental argument appeals to what Stilz calls a “non-ideal” reason for immigration restrictions: a “reason that we have in virtue of the fact that other agents are poorly motivated, and their unwillingness to comply with their moral duties threatens significantly harmful social consequences.”⁷⁸ But in the case of the environmental argument, the agent that is acting unjustly is the very same agent that is seeking to restrict immigration. The state is not seeking to restrict immigration to protect the victims of climate change against the unjust actions of

⁷⁶ Anna Stilz, “Economic Migration: On What Terms?” *Perspectives on Politics* 20, no. 3 (2022): 983–98.

⁷⁷ For defences of the view that the state is the relevant moral agent for climate mitigation, see Darrel Moellendorf, “Taking UNFCCC Norms Seriously,” in *Climate Justice in a Non-Ideal World*, eds. Clare Heyward and Dominic Roser (Oxford University Press, 2016) and Blake Francis, “In Defence of National Climate Responsibility: A Reply to the Fairness Objection,” *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 49, no. 2 (2021): 115–55.

⁷⁸ Stilz, 196.

others, it is seeking to restrict immigration to protect the victims of climate change against its *own* unjust actions in refusing to reduce its emissions to sustainable levels.

This means that high-emitting states cannot themselves appeal to the environmental argument to justify immigration restrictions. Johann Frick has pointed out that justification is “speaker-relative,” which is to say the identity of the agent who is justifying an action can make a difference to whether or not their justification is successful.⁷⁹ In a famous case, G. A. Cohen points out that a kidnapper cannot appeal to their own willingness to kill their victim as a moral justification for why the ransom ought to be paid.⁸⁰ It might be true, as a matter of fact, that the kidnapper will kill their victim if the ransom is not paid. But this is not something to which the kidnapper can appeal as a justification. After all, the kidnapper is perfectly able to release the victim without being given the ransom; it is only the kidnapper’s refusal to do what morality requires of them that makes it the case that the victim cannot be released without the ransom being paid. The kidnapper cannot appeal to their own refusal to do what morality requires of them as a moral justification.

In the same way, high-emitting states cannot appeal to the environmental argument as a justification for the exclusion of would-be immigrants. After all, it is only because states are failing to do what justice requires of them—reduce their per capita emissions to a sustainable rate—that migration has harmful environmental consequences in the first place. High-income states could perfectly well enact aggressive climate mitigation policies that brought down their per capita emissions to a sustainable level. It may be true that migration from low- to high-income states will, in fact, lead to increased greenhouse gas emissions if high-income states do not engage in aggressive climate mitigation. But high-income states cannot appeal to this as a justification for exclusion: they cannot appeal to their own unjust behaviour as a reason to exclude would-be immigrants.

A sincere commitment to tackling climate change would require high-income states to significantly reduce their per capita emissions. If they fail to do so, they cannot at the same time appeal to the environmental argument as a justification for the exclusion of would-be immigrants. But if high-income states *were* to radically reduce their per capita emissions—as justice requires of them—then they would not need to restrict immigration in the first place. High-income states thus cannot appeal to the environmental argument in either scenario. Either

⁷⁹ Johann Frick, “What We Owe to Hypocrites: Contractualism and the Speaker-Relativity of Justification,” *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 44, no. 4 (2016): 223–65.

⁸⁰ G. A. Cohen, *Rescuing Justice and Equality* (Belknap Press, 2008), 38–41.

high-income states radically reduce their emissions, in which case they do not need to restrict immigration, or they do not reduce their emissions, in which case they cannot appeal to the environmental argument as a justification for immigration restrictions. So, if we accept the minimal premise that states that restrict immigration owe a justification for exclusion to would-be immigrants, then the environmental argument cannot justify immigration restrictions.

6. Conclusion

The environmental argument for immigration restrictions suggests that egalitarians who are concerned about climate change ought to support restrictive immigration policies in high-income states. If my arguments are correct, then egalitarians need not endorse this conclusion. Advocates of the environmental argument may well be correct to suggest that at present migration from low- to high-income states leads to increased greenhouse gas emissions overall, but this does not mean that high-income states should restrict immigration. This is not because migration is in some way special, such that migration-related emissions should be exempted from climate mitigation efforts. Nor is it primarily because it is inconsistent to promote development abroad whilst promoting immigration restrictions at home, though it may well be inconsistent. Rather, it is because high-income states are in no position to avail themselves of the environmental argument for restricting immigration. If they were genuinely committed to tackling climate change, then they would enact aggressive climate mitigation policies that brought down their emissions to a globally sustainable rate. And if they were to do so, then there would no longer be any environmental reason to restrict immigration in the first place.