Negative Case: Human Life

Terrorism is constantly in the news. That makes sense; terrorism is worthy of being feared. But here’s something people ought to be talking about a lot more: humans are 600 times more likely to be killed by pollution than terrorism.[[1]](#footnote-2) That’s why I’ll ask you not to affirm this toxic resolution.

# Value: Human Life

You should measure this resolution using a simple metric: between economic growth and environmental protection, which one can save the most lives?

Here’s why this is the best measure.

## Reason to Prefer: End Goal

Both sides of the resolution offer distracting side bonuses. Economic growth improves quality of life: you can have pizza delivered straight to your door and you don’t have to wait for YouTube videos to buffer. Meanwhile, pristine environments are beautiful and serene.

But in the end, the only good reason a developing country has for choosing one over the other is because they have a chance to save the lives of their citizens. That outweighs all other considerations.

# Contention 1: Economic Growth Kills

I know that this isn’t conventional wisdom. That’s why the evidence is so important. Let me prove this contention in two sub-points.

## Sub-Point A) Increased Pollution

Economic growth in developing countries causes pollution. The less you regulate, the more pollution you get.

I quote now from a massive study conducted by Anamika Barua and Klaus Hubacek of the Sustainability Research Institute at the School of Earth and Environment at University of Leeds in 2010:

“India’s economy is currently growing at between 7% and 8% per annum, making it one of the fastest growing economies in the world. The driving force behind this has been the reform program undertaken in the wake of the balance of payments crisis in 1991. The reform program that followed marked a new willingness to allow market forces the freedom to work. It included significant industrial and trade liberalization, financial deregulation, improvements to supervisory and regulatory systems and policies more conducive to privatization and foreign direct investment (Aggarwal 2003). These reforms gave a sharp boost to economic growth in the country. However the benefits of this impressive growth have been accompanied amongst other problems by severe environmental degradation. Environmental pollution is one of the serious problems being faced by the people in the country.”[[2]](#footnote-3)

Now let me be clear: I’m not anti-economy. I’m not saying we should abandon the cities and just eat kale. What I’m saying is that when an economy develops too quickly, the side-effects aren’t worth it. I advocate an economy that grows slowly, steadily, and responsibly within the framework of common sense environmental protection.

I said earlier that the side-effects aren’t worth it. Let’s quantify just how dire the consequences of reckless growth are.

## Sub-Point B) Number One Killer

Globally, pollution is the number one cause of death.

David Pimentel is a professor of ecology and agricultural sciences at Cornell University. In 2007, his research team released a report that was summarized by Science Daily as follows:

“ , air and soil pollution, concludes a Cornell scientist. Such environmental degradation, coupled with the growth in world population, are major causes behind the rapid increase in human diseases worldwide.”

Later in the article, it says:

“Air pollution from smoke and various chemicals kills 3 million people a year. In the United States alone about 3 million tons of toxic chemicals are released into the environment -- contributing to cancer, birth defects, immune system defects and many other serious health problems.”[[3]](#footnote-4)

The air, water, and soil are loaded with toxic chemicals, and our life-sustaining resources are being depleted. Both of these problems stem from reckless economic growth in developing countries. The tragedy is that these nations are deregulating their economies in the belief that they are giving their people a better life. Instead, they are causing a whopping 40% of deaths worldwide.

Terrorism killed 32,600 people in the year 2014[[4]](#footnote-5) and gets endless media attention. Pollution killed about 20 million people,[[5]](#footnote-6) but we accept their deaths as part of the circle of life—as if we were powerless to fight it. We can turn this trend around, as shown in my final point.

## Contention 2: Environmental Protection Saves Lives

Of course, proving that someone would have died from pollution if not for regulations is impossible. But I can prove that environmental regulations are effective at reducing pollution.

Back in the 80s, there was a lot of concern about acid rain. Emissions from factories and coal plants were mixing with rain and blanketing the east coast with poison. Plants and animals were dying, metal was corroding, paint was peeling, stone was eroding. So President Bush Sr. amended the Clean Air Act with important regulations.

James Lardner is a Senior Fellow at public policy research organization Demos. In his 2011 report on US regulation, he said:

“The cap was a limit on total emissions allowed: in a set of 1990 amendments to the Clean Air Act, Congress called for a 50-percent reduction in SO2 emissions over the next 20 years. The trade part was a provision allowing power companies and others to trade a fixed number of emission allowances, or permits to pollute, on a securities-style exchange.”

Three paragraphs later, the report concludes:

“In fact, results came faster and less expensively than almost anyone had expected. By the end of 2002, SO2 emissions had fallen 41 percent from their 1980 levels, dropping 9 percent in the two previous years alone. In 2003, the Congressional Budget Office estimated the benefits to human health at over $70 billion annually; overall benefits had exceeded costs, according to the CBO’s calculations, by a factor of 40 to 1.”[[6]](#footnote-7)

Here’s the bottom line: pollution kills 20 million people every year. If we negate this resolution, we can turn this problem around. We can save lives – and in the end, that’s what really matters. Thank you.

1. 20 million from pollution / 32,600 from terrorism = 613. Evidence for these figures in Contention 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Anamika Barua and Klaus Hubacek. “Water pollution and economic growth: An Environmental Kuznets Curve analysis at the watershed and state level.” No date listed, accessed 12/8/15. <http://www.academia.edu/562987/Water_pollution_and_economic_growth_An_Environmental_Kuznets_Curve_analysis_at_the_watershed_and_state_level> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Cornell University. “Pollution Causes 40 Percent Of Deaths Worldwide, Study Find.” *Science Daily*, August 14, 2007. <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2007/08/070813162438.htm> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. <http://www.smh.com.au/world/terrorism-deaths-in-2014-the-highest-on-record-global-terrorism-index-2015-finds-20151119-gl2puz.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. 49.4 million deaths per year according to <http://www.worldlifeexpectancy.com/world-rankings-total-deaths> x 40% = 19.7 million. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. James Lardner. “Good Rules: 10 Stories of Successful Regulation.” *Demos,* Nov. 12, 2010. <http://docslide.us/documents/good-rules-ten-stories-of-successful-regulation.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)