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Editors' Note

Green jobs. This new phrase, now so popular, artfully joins an adjective advertising concern for climate change and the environment with a noun signaling a concern for economic growth. The genius of the “green jobs” formulation is that it subverts the old opposition between those who favor economic development and those who favor defending the environment.

The rapid diffusion of this term itself suggests the genius behind it. A few short years ago, the detractors of the green movement pushed an image of privileged, chardonnay-sipping, tree-hugging environmentalists all too ready to sacrifice the jobs of loggers, miners, or factory workers, all too quick to bury an economic development project promising thousands of jobs just to defend the nesting grounds of the blue-billed spikfisher. The conception of “green jobs,” by contrast, brings together environmentalism and economic development in one glorious package, with the suggestion that we can have our cake and eat it too, that we can have a booming economy that, rather than destroying the environment, in fact saves it.

The “green jobs” formulation doesn't, however, entirely shed the elitist tag affixed to the environmentalism of the past. It also comes with the presumption, lurking only slightly beneath the surface, that the green jobs being created are, in the end, jobs for the privileged class, jobs for the friends and children of those old, chardonnay-sipping, tree-hugging environmentalists. If now they suddenly care about jobs, maybe it is just because it provides jobs for themselves and their ilk, for the legion of freshly-minted Silicon Valley green engineers, venture capitalists, and lawyers.

The crucial empirical question, then, is whether a green economy can indeed provide not only jobs but jobs for *all*. Is there any evidence in favor of the radical view, which surely has its adherents, that an investment in green jobs is a “silver bullet” that operates at once as an environment-saver and poverty-killer? Or must we instead own up to the inconvenient truth that green jobs are typically high-skill and will at best generate larger paychecks for the already privileged few? If so, this doesn't necessarily imply that our commitment to a green economy should be abandoned. It just means that we should shed the fairy tale and be realistic about the poverty-fighting effects of a green economy.

This is where the Fall issue of *Pathways* comes in. We have asked top scholars and policy makers to honestly assess whether a green investment will likely yield a good return in terms of (a) the number of jobs created and (b) the distribution of those jobs across income levels. We lead off with former White House “Green Jobs Czar” Van Jones laying out the argument that a green investment does indeed deliver on both counts. The follow-up article, featuring John Podesta (former White House Chief of Staff and the current President of the Center for American Progress) and Sarah Miller (Center for American Progress policy advisor), examines how current and future legislation might reduce the rate of climate change and create new economic opportunities. Next, Manhattan Institute Senior Fellow Max Schulz weighs in with a more skeptical analysis, one suggesting that, while a green investment may be justifiable for environmental and climate change reasons, it is not a good investment on purely economic grounds. In the closing essay, Kil Huh and Lori Granger of the Pew Charitable Trusts present an innovative survey of all green jobs currently in the economy, a survey that reveals that not all green jobs are for the privileged.

We leave it to our readers to sort out the bottom line. If there is room for disagreement, it is partly because there are now two green economies standing side-by-side, one comprising higher-income jobs (e.g., green engineer) and another comprising lower-income ones (e.g., insulation installer). The Pathways mantra is that the future of these two sub-economies will, like all economic institutions, be governed as much by the visible hand of policy as by the invisible hand of market forces.

—David Grusky & Christopher Wimer, Senior Editors