



The research team here at **Fortune's Pawn** has been hard at work since the hard closed door of ethics was cracked open last night when the question of sin transference was broached with the Burningman article (below). The team of Googling Monkeys® was unleashed upon the Internet and came back with this interesting piece from *The International Herald Tribune* "[Carbon footprint offsets: False sense of satisfaction?](#)"

"These companies may be operating with the best will in the world, but they are doing so in settings where it's not really clear you can monitor and enforce their projects over time," said Steve Rayner, a senior professor at Oxford and a member of a working group on reducing greenhouse gases for the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

"What these companies are allowing people to do is carry on with their current behavior with a clear conscience," Rayner said.

This is the point that has **Pawn** wondering about the ethics and efficacy of these programs. Nobility of intent aside, are these programs really providing results? What are the ethics of paying someone else to be good on your behalf?

Is a philanderer less bad if he pays someone else to be celibate? What if the celibate would be celibate even without the philanderer's gold? Or, to take a real world example, consider the case of Climate Care, from the article:

...the company was engaging in a program that funded the distribution of tens of thousands of low-energy fluorescent light bulbs in South African townships.

But a state energy utility soon afterward distributed millions of similar bulbs for free, so that the "so-called reductions that Climate Care is selling to its customers arguably would have happened anyway,"

said Larry Lohmann of The Corner House

Other examples abound, of projects which purport to offer great offsets but in reality offer little or none, or of conflicts of interest in the selling of legitimate pollution credits.

And of course there is the issue of whether someone buying offsets will simply feel free to keep on generating greenhouse gases since they are now absolved of the guilt that should go along with it.

Much to ponder here...

Also the [topic of discussion](#) at *Thinking Ethics*.