**Ecological Liberalism and Ecological Citizenship**

**Abstract**

This paper is a contribution to the field of individual climate ethics. It asks how people with high-emitting lifestyles could and should fulfill their duty of climate justice to reduce their carbon footprint by contrasting the ecological liberal approach supported by climate justice scholars with the ecological citizenship model proposed by green political theorists.

According to ecological liberalism, “[p]ersons should limit their environmental impacts in order to fulfill their responsibilities to future generations but can choose how to discharge this responsibility (selecting whether to do it through lowering consumption, enhanced use of clean technology, or limiting reproduction)” (Caney 2020, 359). By giving a central place to agents’ freedom to choose and to realize their life-projects, this approach primarily wants to ensure that the duty to reduce one’s carbon emissions is not overly demanding (Fragnière 2018). It insists on the idea that people can freely “select” between different courses of action to reduce their carbon footprint.

But by conceding too much to the “over-demandingness objection”, ecological liberalism becomes vulnerable to an “under-demandingness objection”. In our context of climate emergency, demandingness is hard to avoid. Our carbon budget is very scarce and rapidly decreasing (IPCC 2018). We are also getting dangerously close to self-reinforcing feedbacks that could push the Earth system toward a “hothouse Earth” pathway caused by a cascade of tipping points (Steffen et al. 2018; Lenton et al. 2019).

The first objective of the paper is to defend the idea that technological innovation, lifestyle changes and population control should take place *quickly* and *jointly* if we are to keep global temperatures well below 2°C (Rogelj et al. 2018; van Vuuren et al. 2018). In other words, it is not a matter of choosing freely between different mitigation measures, but of deploying all of them *simultaneously*, before our carbon budget is exhausted.

The second objective of the paper is to investigate whether ecological citizenship could be a more adequate model than ecological liberalism to think in terms of simultaneity of action. It will ask whether ecological liberalism should be replaced or complemented by ecological citizenship. It will also ask how ecological citizenship could in turn respond to the over-demandingness objection.

The paper will explore two major features of ecological citizenship. First, this model shifts the focus from the currency of environmental rights and liberties to the one of responsibilities and obligations. It is first and foremost concerned about the *sustainability* of individuals’ ecological footprint: “the ecological citizen will want to ensure that her or his ecological footprint does not compromise or foreclose the ability of others in present and future generations to pursue options important to them” (Dobson 2003, 119). Second, this model supports that a truly sustainable lifestyle implies radical changes in our relationship with the non-human world, in our values, and in our behaviours (Dobson 2007, 2–3). It requires individuals to aim for a *sustainable carbon footprint* by following high-impact actions, such as avoiding luxury airplane travel, living car-free, eating a plant-based diet, and having one fewer child (Wynes and Nicholas 2017). What are the possible advantages and limits of such a radical approach? How does ecological citizenship help us to think about individual climate ethics?

**Keywords**: Climate Ethics; Ecological Liberalism; Ecological Citizenship; Sustainability

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