**Why Having Children does not count towards Parents’ Carbon Footprints**

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Several climate ethicists have recently argued that, due to its large impact on the environment and the climate, having children is morally equivalent to over-consumption, and contributes greatly to parents' personal carbon footprints. We show that this is mistaken for two reasons:

First, the position that procreation counts towards parents' carbon footprints leads to double-counting of children's consumption emissions, by including them in both their parents' *and* their own footprints. Double-counting makes the carbon footprint unsuitable as a measure for the sustainability and equitability of one's activities and choices. Furthermore, any attempt to avoid double counting by counting some of children's consumption emissions towards their own, and some towards their parents' footprints has problematic implications for children's footprints: Some of their consumption emissions will then no longer feature in their personal carbon footprints, and thus children's own contribution to climate change is misrepresented.

Second, procreation and consumption are supposedly morally equivalent because both are voluntary actions which foreseeably lead to additional carbon emissions. But this reasoning overgenerates: Saving someone's life would turn out to generate an enormous carbon footprint. We should therefore assume a narrower conception of what counts towards one's footprint. On this conception procreation would be morally distinct from consumption.

We conclude that children's emissions should not count towards parents' personal carbon footprints. However, this does not make procreation morally innocuous: After all, having a child does make a difference to overall carbon emissions. We propose that rather than counting one's children's emissions towards parents' carbon *footprints*, i.e. atmospheric absorption capacity that parents use up, we should consider these emissions as part of the parents' carbon *impact*, i.e. the difference that one’s choices make to the overall global carbon emissions. Carbon footprint and carbon impact are relevant for different ethical questions. The carbon footprint is relevant for questions of equitable distribution of a scarce resource. Carbon impact, by contrast, is relevant for a consequentialist-style assessment of what individuals ought to do to reduce overall carbon emissions. When we ask about fair shares of emissions, we must consider individuals' carbon footprints, and then we cannot weigh procreative choices against consumptive choices. When we ask about people's potential impact on the climate, however, we also have to consider procreation. It is from this perspective, and not from a supposed ethical equivalence to consumption, that we need to investigate the ethics of procreation in an age of climate change.

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