Sustainability, Limitarianism and Political Responsibility
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Ingrid Robeyns (Utrecht University)

Three ecological arguments for economic limitarianism

Economic limitarianism is the moral view that there should be an upper limit to how much income and wealth we can have. It could be formulated as a political view, or as a voluntaristic moral view, or as a combination. So far, a range of arguments has been offered for economic limitarianism. This paper looks into the question whether one could make an ecological argument, and if so, whether such an argument would be *distinctively* ecological. At first sight, one might think such an argument is possible, since there is a clear positive correlation between the income and wealth levels of persons and their negative impact on ecosystems. However, one might argue that *analytically*, this does not amount to an ecological argument for economic limitarianism, since one might imagine a superrich person who uses their fortune simply to save more and more, or who uses their fortune to establish a collection of very expensive paintings. Is there then a genuine ecological argument for economic limitarianism? I will show that the answer to this question depends on what we take to be the success criteria for an argument, that is, when we judge that an argument is sound and plausible. I will present three different types of analyses or arguments that one could make, and argue that while on the most analytical of those types there is no distinct ecological argument for economic limitarianism, the other more action guiding analyses do give us ecological reasons for economic limitarianism.

Lisa Herzog (Groningen University)

Liberal egalitarianism beyond methodological atomism

Although John Rawls' seminal *Theory of Justice* does contain some sociological and socio-psychological reflections, the post-Rawlsian liberal egalitarian tradition has rarely taken these up. Instead, it often relied on methodological assumptions similar to those of neoclassical economics, which conceptualize individuals in an atomistic way: as separate units, each of which holds a certain bundle of resources or reaches a certain score on a welfare scale. Such an ontology is insufficiently relational and overlooks the many ways in which an individual's resources, welfare, or opportunities gain their value from the resources, welfare, or opportunities of other individuals in society. It also fails to consider the ways in which resources – as one key distribuendum in many theories of distributive justice – are never *just* resources: they are also sources of societal power and influence, which can spill over from one social sphere to others. A helpful counterpoint can be found, for example, in the sociological work of Pierre Bourdieu, who described the relations between different forms of capital. He distinguished financial, social, and cultural capital (and today, one might want to add additional forms such as attentional capital), which can be translated into each other.

Without giving up *normative* individualism, such a perspective, with its more realistic *descriptive* account of individuals as embedded in social structures, leads to rather different implications with regard to economic institutions and the degree of inequality in societies that is normatively justified. It makes visible how advantages and disadvantages along many dimensions tend to cluster and reinforce each other. One upshot of such a perspective is to provide a defense of limitarianism, not as non-ideal theory justified mainly by the unmet needs of the poor, but as ideal

theory for a society that wants to preserve equality along certain dimensions and therefore cannot let inequalities in other dimensions grow beyond a certain point.

Lori Keleher (New Mexico State University)

The Limits of Limitarianism (Revisited)

The primary goal of this work is to clarify the limits and recognize strengths of *Limitarianism* so that we might effectively operationalize its best insights in promoting authentic human development.

In 2020 I offered a critical evaluation of Ingrid Robeyns's Limitarianism as developed in her "Having Too Much" (2016) and "What, if Anything, is Wrong with Extreme Wealth?" (2019). In each of these works she appeals to arguments from democracy and from unmet needs as she advances Limitarianism. "Limitarianism claims that one can theoretically construct a Riches Line and that a world in which no one would be above the riches line would be a better world" (Robeyns's 2019). I argued that although the riches line is a clever and easy to grasp tool for the redistribution of wealth that might ultimately be used to promote authentic human development, the tool alone – and therefore Robeyns's Limitarianism – is neither necessary nor sufficient for advancing democracy, meeting unmet needs, or promoting authentic human development.

In this current work, I revisit my positions on democracy, unmet needs, and authentic human development in the context of the still evolving and increasingly sophisticated Limitarianism literature of today (2022). I then take up questions of Limitarianism's effectiveness in addressing some of the issues related to climate change and human development.

I explore philosophical and theoretical questions about the nature and scope of Limitarianism (e.g., Is Limitarianism really a theory? Does it make sense to talk about "*Limitarianisms,*" e.g., economic-limitarianism, ecological-limitarianism, resource-limitarianism, carbon-limitarianism, etc.?). I also explore practical questions about the ways and extent to which Limitarianism might prove a helpful resource for policy on climate change and human development (e.g., might (economic) Limitarianism result in *higher* global carbon emissions?) My (preliminary) conclusion is that Limitarianism is neither necessary nor sufficient for promoting democracy, meeting the unmet needs of the poor, addressing climate change, or practicing authentic human development. However, it can be helpful when crafting policy to address these issues. Robeyns and other Limitarians are to be congratulated on and encouraged in their continued academically interesting and practically important work.

Simon Caney (Warwick University)

Power, Political Responsibilities and Climate Change

Tackling climate change and the transition to a zero carbon economy requires a radical transformation of the social, economic and political institutions that structure our lives. It calls for the overhaul of our cities, towns, and buildings and infrastructure; putting a price on carbon; mass electrification; the extensive deployment of renewables; investing in clean energy and facilitating clean energy transfer; preventing deforestation; and the radical re-evaluation of existing practices and social norms. It is also imperative that this transition is a just one, one in which any burdens are borne by those with the greatest ability to pay.
All this requires concerted political action. But what kind of political action is required? Who has what political responsibilities to bring about this change? One common refrain is that (an unspecified) 'we' should bring about an (undefined) 'structural change'. This is along the right lines, but it is also too abstract and too vague to be action-guiding. It is important to know: What specific

courses of action should be adopted? By who? On what basis? And, how can the relevant duty-bearers identify these duties?

In addition to this, one important lesson from the research in political science and the literature on energy transitions is that the necessary change can occur only through the construction of inclusive coalitions, and cooperation with others both within and across national boundaries. However the formation of such political networks and coalitions has further normative implications. For example, agents have duties to effect a just transition to a sustainable world, but many who are committed to this in a broad sense disagree on many issues – the appropriate climate target, the root causes of the problem, what policy measures should be adopted, and what means may be used. How do we negotiate these disagreements in ways that are fair and legitimate and result in effective political action? Some will argue that the need to build a broad coalition necessitates compromise; others will object that this results in insufficiently radical action. How should we adjudicate such claims?

My aim in this paper is to provide some answers to these questions. Drawing on the social scientific work on the politics and political economy of carbon, energy and energy transitions, I outline an account of agents' political responsibilities.

Andrew Crabtree (Copenhagen Business School)

When should we just give up?

Climate change is already here, for example Inuit populations in the North of Canada and Sami Reindeer herders in the north of Sweden are already seeing threats to their livelihoods and ways of life due in part, to insufficient ice affecting hunting and herding activities. Together with person-made natural disasters the future is bleak. Substantial biodiversity loss is also already here. As the Brundtland Report stated in 1968 these problems are "urgent". The Brundtland deadline was 22 years ago. The deadline now is 2030. The call for nature-based solutions made, among others, by the IPCCC and Rewilding Britain would seem to have a clear moral imperative. If actions leading to climate change and biodiversity loss are not wrong, what is? As Thomas Scanlon has argued, if we can contribute to stopping something "very bad" from happening, we should.

In *The Idea of Justice* Amartya Sen put forward a comparative theory of justice which, he argued, enabled us to advance our ideas about justice even though we have no complete theory of justice. We can move forward on generally agreed criteria on which the billions of people referred to by the IPCCC should be able to readily agree. Given the fact that we do not have a complete theory of justice and are unlikely to have one before 2030, Sen's idea seems attractive.

However, we do not. We have a plurality of values which include the importance of identity, place, cultures, ways of life and aesthetic values which have been invoked to stop regeneration and rewilding projects. Furthermore, nature-based solutions have, in practice, sometimes been seen as eco-colonialism. NGOs including Survival International and Amnesty International have estimated that around 300 million people could be negatively and seriously affected by the 30 by 30 (30% of territorial and marine areas to be protected by 2030). The land rights of indigenous communities will be threatened. Sami herders seen climate change as an *additional* problem. Another being predators eating their reindeer. A straightforward moral issue seems to become intractable. There are, Sen argues, problems that simply *cannot* be solved. The question asked here is: When we should give up? The paper will provide copious examples of the problems involved.