

# Fragnière on individual responsibility

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Climate change and environmental ethics  
26 November 2019

# Outline

Instead of an introduction: A trolley problem

Individual duty and the climate crisis

Duty to reduce carbon footprint

Duty to promote and support collective action

Conclusions & some thoughts

Points for discussion

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- ▶ Do you have a duty to reduce your usage of the trolley (or to drive it more slowly, with lighter loads)?
- ▶ Do you have a duty to promote communal action to restrict the usage of the trolley?
- ▶ Now suppose nothing is done about the situation and the trolley breaks. Is there someone who is responsible for the situation?

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- ▶ Dale Jamieson (1992): 'common sense morality' evolved for the needs of small communities, thus the problem on the global scale requires a revision of the common sense morality.
- ▶ Two main duties: (1) duty to reduce individual carbon footprint; and (2) duty to support and promote collective action against climate change.

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- ▶ Most authors conclude that we have at least some duty to reduce our individual carbon footprint.
- ▶ However, barely anyone says moral agents should bring their carbon footprint to zero. Main reasons for this are that such duty would be both overly *demanding* and outside of *control* of an individual.

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- ▶ Top-down approach: change institutions.

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- ▶ Elizabeth Cripps: promotional (collective) efforts are not 'throw-away acts' like in the case of GHG emissions, but contribute to a collective endeavour.



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## Conclusions & some thoughts

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2. The duties will, however, depend on the particular circumstances of an individual, and must therefore be decided (at least partially) on a case by case basis.
3. There is no consensus which of the two duties (reducing the carbon footprint or collective action) takes precedence in case of a conflict.

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- ▶ Many of the counterintuitive conclusions and problems faced by the mainstream (western) ethical theories seem to arise from an obsession with the individual (tragedy of the commons, non-identity problem, objections discussed by Fragnière). I therefore suggest to read the problems these ethical theories face when dealing with the commons or collectives as symptoms of the crisis of individualism.

## Points for discussion

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2. Fragnière views the debate on the individual responsibility as an attempt to respond to Jamieson's revision of 'common sense morality'. How would you envision this revision?



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Do you think we have a *moral duty* to do any of these?

## Source text

- ▶ Augustin Fragnière. *Climate change and individual duties*. Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Climate Change, 7(6), 798-814.