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**| RESEARCH ARTICLE****Metaphysics for Climate Disobedience****Leonardo Caffo***Department of Applied Arts and Design, Nuova Accademia di Belle Arti, Milano, Italy***Corresponding Author:** Leonardo Caffo, **E-mail:** [leonardo.caffo@naba.it](mailto:leonardo.caffo@naba.it)

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**| ABSTRACT**

This article examines the metaphysical foundations necessary for a coherent practice of climate-oriented civil disobedience. Drawing from classical theories of civil disobedience—beginning with Henry David Thoreau—it argues that such action has traditionally presupposed a weakly realist moral metaphysics, in which moral truths exist independently to some degree and provide a basis for opposing unjust laws. This foundation is profoundly challenged by the shift from anthropocentrism to radical ecologism, which decenters the human and questions hierarchical ontologies of value. The analysis critiques the anthropocentric premises underlying much classical civil disobedience and proposes instead a relational, non-hierarchical metaphysics inspired by contemporary thinkers such as Emanuele Coccia, Timothy Morton, Donna Haraway, and Stefano Mancuso. In this framework, climate disobedience is reframed not primarily as a utilitarian strategy aimed at efficacy or progress, but as an act of fidelity and friendship toward the more-than-human world. Ultimately, it is reconceptualized as a minimalist pedagogy of finitude and a secular liturgy of anticipatory mourning. This practice commits to reducing entropic violence—the irreversible disorder imposed on ecosystems and future beings—and to fostering non-predatory relations amid conditions of ecological exhaustion. Crucially, it proceeds without eschatological guarantees or promises of salvation, embracing circular fidelity over linear causal efficacy. In an era where +1.5 °C has already been exceeded and techno-optimist narratives falter, such disobedience becomes stubborn testimony: a refusal to pretend that business-as-usual remains viable, even when outcomes remain uncertain.

**| KEYWORDS**

Climate Disobedience, Metaphysics, Civil Disobedience, Minimalist Pedagogy

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**1. Introduction**

Civil disobedience is not a method but a family of procedures imbued with an anarchist undertone, employed in pursuit of an ostensibly democratic purpose. At least since Henry David Thoreau's classic text, the verb "to disobey" has denoted a non-violent means of opposing state laws deemed unjust, set against a presumed moral progress toward which those very laws ought to aspire. Whether within a purely anarchist framework ("laws are unnecessary") or a reformist democratic one ("laws must improve"), civil disobedience implies the existence of a superior or better moral background vis-à-vis the norm it opposes. One may therefore venture, on logical grounds, that civil disobedience rests upon a weakly realist metaphysics with respect to ethical entities, from which a specific political philosophy follows.

To proceed with some order:

It is civil disobedience only if it repudiates violence;

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It is civil disobedience only if it opposes the just (moral) to the justified (legal norm);

It is civil disobedience only if it adopts a realist stance toward certain entities concerning good/evil or useful/useless;

It is civil disobedience only if it implies progress, either toward the abolition of laws (anarchy) or toward their profound reform (democracy).

## **2. The Metaphysical Presuppositions of Classical Civil Disobedience**

Over the last thirty years, amid growing concrete concern with climatic and environmental issues, civil disobedience and ecological activism have frequently intersected [1]. They have done so within various democratic systems (and beyond), across the globe, and within the digital sphere and its “new” forms of organization and self-organization. From the preceding point it follows, obviously, that civil disobedience can be deployed to “defend the climate” only if certain propositions are held to be true [2].

Despite the diversity of symbolic forms, consider the following list: climate activism that employs civil disobedience must

take as certain that climate change depends also and especially on the actions of Homo sapiens;

accept as valid that legal methodologies for curbing climate-related problems are wholly inadequate; [3]

accept as valid that activists’ actions, even within a non-violent framework, when they complicate democratic procedures and risk breaking the law, do so only insofar as the moral form is superior to the legal one;

take as certain that their work serves to abolish or profoundly reform political and economic mechanisms that harm the climate, in favor of improved living conditions for Homo sapiens [4]

## **3. Challenges in the Shift to Radical Ecologism**

It may seem pedantically analytical, but some order is necessary. The paradigmatic shift from anthropocentrism to radical ecologism constitutes a gigantic change of state; perhaps precisely because of this transformation we have not yet developed an adequate language. Combining two inherently problematic procedures—civil disobedience and climate activism—is far from easy or obvious. Taken seriously, the schema we have outlined raises infinite questions to which very few answers have yet been given...

Who decides which human action contributing to climate change should be blocked and which should not? Is a vague criterion of useful/useless sufficient? Where does violence begin? Is blocking a road or occupying a courthouse less violent than striking someone? Do we truly possess a realist moral theory grounded in an incontrovertible metaphysics? If no absolute good exists, who decides that living in respect for the planet is preferable to its coerced exploitation? If our actions are not truly “useful” in surpassing a threshold that produces real change... what sense is there in continuing them?

I permit myself, in these few pages, to assert that a large part of the concrete problems currently confronting climate activism stem precisely from the avoidance of a debate capable of answering this partial list of questions. One cannot hope, as in any other case, to found a theory of climate civil disobedience in fully rational terms; yet given the stakes, perhaps we should all make a more concrete effort in this direction.

## **4. Toward a Non-Hierarchical, Relational Metaphysics**

A metaphysics for climate disobedience takes a form radically opposed to all Aristotelian-derived metaphysics organized more or less hierarchically, with more or less “animalist” scales and tree-like structures. A metaphysics for climate disobedience—one we might draw from living authors such as Emanuele Coccia or Timothy Morton in philosophy, or Donna Haraway or Stefano Mancuso in science—is one that calls into question a hierarchical scale of the living,<sup>5</sup> a prejudicial animal/plant distinction, and a mind-dependence mechanism linking what Homo sapiens sees or knows to the ontological entities that ought to populate the universe. Whatever the authors or final considerations, an ecologically oriented metaphysics aims to assist the schemas previously outlined, since, once the paradigm shifts [5],

good and evil are no longer related solely to human individuals;

the very categories of good and evil, following Nietzsche's legacy, no longer possess anything absolute in the sense of a general Hegelian presupposition;

the world ceases to be the totality of facts, as in the early Wittgenstein's Tractatus, and becomes the totality of possible (and thus discretely infinite) relations among the more-than-countable forms of life (and para-life) human and non-human that compose all reality;

ascending toward the metaphysical heavens, the territory of human laws becomes merely a temporary convention, and it is for this reason that they can be pushed elsewhere through disobedient means.

### **5. Faith, Fidelity, and the Limits of Utility in Climate Disobedience**

Continuing the reasoning, an apparently peripheral theme inevitably arises. Much of the difficulty and consequent resistance encountered by climate civil disobedience in public debate stems from the fact—unresolvable quickly—that deriving direct behaviors from any such upstream metaphysical shift is far from obvious. One may have internalized the revolution of plant neurobiology or an animalist metaphysics without thereby deriving ecologically oriented behaviors: doing so, making one's actions follow from a different worldview, is nothing more than an act of faith. An act of faith akin to that in anthropocentrism, in Christian or Jewish religion... From some inevitably hyper-partial set of world-images we decide to derive a political organization of human society [6].

Every political act derived from metaphysics is an act of faith;<sup>6</sup> the same holds for climate civil disobedience. It is within this rationalist spiritualism that the debate must be relocated, avoiding an unnecessary proliferation of data—interpretable from every side—on how and how much we have harmed the planet. We should abandon even more anthropocentric terminologies, for instance discarding "Anthropocene" and the like, and recognize that it is unwise to persist in claiming every climatic phenomenon is humanity's fault: 1) it is trivially false and 2) it is the most anthropocentric claim imaginable. The problem is not that humanity fails to care for the planet but that humanity does not care for its relation to the planet—a far more complex issue than the simplifications dominating public debate. Remaining in such simplification means surrendering to an intelligence-free territory: the planet has always transcended and ignored us and does what it wills; the problem is how to become its friend, not how to cease being its master, since we never were.

Producing a theory of friendship between us and the planet—perhaps even between us and the universe—is a way to transform metaphysics into faith. For the author, though this is not the appropriate venue to develop the point, the central question is precisely this transition [7]

### **6. From Progress to Stability: A Minimalist Reframing**

It might seem a way to depower climate activism, but it is not: every cultural act that seeks foundation in the presumed real of the world is an act of faith.

Climate civil disobedience must have faith—presupposed and unjustifiable—in at least some things. Forgive yet another bulleted list:

Faith in the possibility of effecting genuine, politically efficacious change starting from individual or micro-collective behaviors, which also implies (a.1) faith in the future;

Faith in science and in ecology as a "mostly true" theory, to such an extent that it must significantly condition the questioning of our anthropocentric privileges;

Faith that planet Earth truly benefits from a reduction of our ecological footprint and that we benefit from this presumed benefit to it;

Faith in the extremely remote possibility of producing collective, systemic geopolitical change on an issue that carries weight only in capitalistically privileged countries;

Faith that people care more about a hypothetical future than a comfortable, certain present in which the climate

remains largely tolerable for our anthropocentric lives;

Faith that the ecologist metaphysics is not mistaken and surpassable like anthropocentric ones;

A paradoxical faith in the very humanity being fiercely criticized: otherwise there would be no sense in discussing how to effect change.

### **7. Disobedience as Pedagogy of Finitude and Anticipatory Mourning**

I deliberately avoid touching on more concrete themes here. The obvious consideration is that one must believe in something anyway: how does climate civil disobedience operate within this belief rather than another? A central role—once again purely fideistic and somewhat special—is played by the concepts of hope and future.

Climate activism must ground its operative bases in the idea that hope for change and the notion of an improved, trans-generational ethical future<sup>7</sup> are taken as given by everyone. This point marks precisely the passage from the metaphysical to the political, especially when the whole must rest on an ethically complex methodology such as disobedience: how can we nonchalantly convince an entire population to trade a reasonably comfortable “here and now” for an uncertain future? And who assures us that hope for change and actual change are somehow connected? There is certainly no causal nexus. There is imagination, obviously, understood as a strategy for sketching a presumed scenario free of anthropocentrism,<sup>8</sup> but how can an entire revolution be tethered to imagination?

For these reasons, ecologically oriented civil disobedience must attempt at least two things immediately:

Demonstrate that the world we currently inhabit is already the product of anthropocentrism and that, even if many continue to live in it quite well, for the majority of Homo sapiens it is already hell;

Show that an ecologist metaphysics, taken seriously, produces not only privative behaviors but also healthy sources of knowledge and pleasure otherwise unexplored.

These last two points begin to lead us toward slightly firmer ground. We cannot have certainty about the future, but we have sufficient data showing that current ecosystemic equilibrium has been partially influenced by Homo sapiens.<sup>9</sup> On this basis it is evident that, should this weak human → climate change correlation persist, our privileged lives may face ever greater backlashes, preservable only through the preceding point (b): being ecological is not a privative method but the only way we have to continue—amid all uncertainties—to experience certain pleasures that would be lost under definitive imbalance.

### **8. Counter-Objections and Responses**

From all that has been said thus far, I believe the ultimate goal of ecologically oriented civil disobedience is to link itself to a critique of progress for its own sake in favor of a theory of stability [8],

We have lived the last decades—from advanced capitalism onward—following what we may call the formula of progress:

[tP – ... tP ... tP +]

The past subtracts, the present is stable, the future adds to the present. Yet the crises we face risk inverting the formula into

[tP + ... tP ... tP –].

A theory of stability, simplified, should instead function as follows:

[tP +/- ... tP ... tP ... tP ... tP ...].

Where tP tends toward the finite, given by the natural exhaustion of terrestrial resources and not by our continuous push beyond the threshold effect [9],

## 9. Aesthetics and Liturgy in Contemporary Climate Disobedience

Toward a Disobedience, That Promises No Salvation, but Presence

If we accept that every ecologist metaphysics worthy of the name must renounce the idea of an “absolute good” and also the idea that a collective human subject can redeem itself through calculated sacrifice, then climate disobedience can no longer present itself as an instrument toward an ultimate end. There is no *télos*. There is no eschatological coronation, neither in the secularized form of “net-zero 2050” nor in the more mystical one of “return to cosmic equilibrium.”

What remains, then, is a practice justified in a circular, almost tautological manner: one disobeys because one is already within a relation of care that precedes utilitarian calculation and survives its possible falsification.

This circularity is not a logical defect to be eliminated; it is the very hallmark of what we call “fidelity” when we no longer wish to use “faith” in a religious sense. One remains faithful to a certain quality of relation with the non-human living even when—and especially when—one has no guarantee that such fidelity will produce the desired effect. This is the deep structure already legible, in counterlight, in Bonhoeffer’s prison letters when he speaks of “responsible action in the time of God’s weakness”: one acts not because one knows God will save the world, but precisely because one no longer knows and yet refuses to let violence or indifference have the last word.

Applied to climate, the formula becomes uncomfortable and almost unbearable for many activists: one blocks a highway, defaces an artwork shielded by bulletproof glass, occupies a roundabout before a fossil bank headquarters not because one is certain it will halt X tonnes of emissions by 2031, but because in that act one testifies—to oneself before others—that the possibility still exists of preferring relation to predation even when predation appears the only rational behavior left.

This stance drains much rhetorical oxygen from classical activism. It removes the promise. It removes the grand narrative. Above all, it removes the comforting illusion that an “epochal turning point” lies within reach if only “people would wake up.” What remains is an almost monastic sobriety: one does what one can with the hands one has, in the time one has, knowing it will very likely not suffice.

Yet precisely this subtraction of promises may restore ethical depth to climate disobedience in the 2025–2026 biennium, when—per Copernicus and IPCC data—it is now clear that the global average stably exceeded +1.5 °C already in 2024, and 2025 ranks as the third-warmest year on record (marginally cooler than 2023 and 2024). In this context, groups such as Just Stop Oil announced in March 2025 their decision to “hang up the hi-vis” and end direct action after three years of high-media-impact actions (road blocks, soup on Van Gogh, paint on public buildings), claiming partial victory in securing UK government policy against new North Sea oil and gas licences. Extinction Rebellion has shifted toward less disruptive campaigns (“The Big One” of 2023 already marked a turning point), while in Italy Ultima Generazione persists in 2026 with insistent campaigns such as “Tagliamo l’IVA” (redirecting fiscal resources from fossils to anti-collapse measures) and crowdfunding appeals for “a 2026 of actions,” following a 2025 marked by arrests, trials, and intensifying repression [10]

In this juncture, disobedience is no longer “effective” in the linear-causal sense; it has become stubborn testimony in an era of exhaustion of techno-optimist utopias.

## 10. Conclusion

Stability Is Not a State, but a Direction of Reduced Violence

Let us reformulate the theory of stability in even more minimal and defensible terms:

Ecologically desirable stability is not a mythical plateau of pre-lapsarian harmony, but the systematic reduction of the entropic violence that a certain mode of inhabiting the world discharges onto other living beings and future generations.

Reduction, not elimination. Direction, not achievable state. Lesser violence, not absence of violence. This reformulation has the advantage of requiring no optimistic cosmology nor faith in a “planet that will forgive us if we

repent.” It suffices to recognize five points:

Every human act bears a differential entropic footprint (produces more irreversible disorder than it repairs);

Certain contemporary ways of life (especially in high-income economies) bear a differential entropic footprint orders of magnitude greater than others;

A threshold exists beyond which a society’s differential entropic footprint renders impossible certain symbiotic relations that were previously possible (e.g., coral reefs, primary rainforests, stable hydrological cycles);

Climate disobedience can act as a negative feedback switch on devices that maximize that footprint (new fossil infrastructure, SUV advertising, upstream oil & gas financing, planned obsolescence);

In parallel, it can open micro-spaces for experimenting lower-footprint ways of life (distributed energy communities, community-supported agriculture, repair over replacement, low-tech conviviality, collective rites of mourning for lost ecosystems).

It is no longer a matter of “saving the planet.” It is a matter of reducing the quota of entropic brutality we claim as a natural right of our standard of living. In this sense disobedience is not heroic: it is pedagogy of finitude.

If we accept this minimalist reformulation, then the only element still capable of aspiring to some form of universalizability is no longer the “human good,” nor the “good of the planet,” nor “science.” The only remaining universal is perhaps the question: “To what extent does this gesture I am about to perform increase or decrease the possibility that another living being (human or non-human, present or future) may in turn experience a non-predatory relation with the world?”

This question admits no algorithmic answer. It has no ESG scorecard. It has no associated decarbonization targets. Yet it is the only question that survives when all strong metaphysics collapse—Aristotelian, Hegelian, Marxist-humanist, techno-optimist.

And here an unexpected space opens for disobedience: it becomes a public, visible exercise of response to that question. Blocking a highway for a few hours does not “solve” the climate; yet it makes it impossible, for that brief time and in that precise place, to pretend the question does not exist. The disobedient act is a forcing of the question’s visibility.

Those indignant at the inconvenience caused should then be compelled to answer: “Yes, I understand the question, but I consciously choose not to hear it.” This is already an enormous ethical gain compared to the prior situation, in which the question was simply not posed.

No conclusion is possible without addressing the harshest objections raised from multiple quarters in 2026:

From right-wing and populist center-right: “You are privileged urban elites disturbing working people. Your disobedience is egoism disguised as morality.”

Response: It is true that many activists come from middle-high backgrounds, but the social composition of Ultima Generazione and XR is more mixed than it appears (workers, precarious, students, retirees). The inconvenience caused is real, but minor compared to the suffering climate collapse already imposes on the poorest (lethal heatwaves in India 2025, floods in Emilia-Romagna 2023–2025, drought in Sicily). Disobedience does not demand prior consensus; it demands that the privilege of not hearing the question be challenged.

From accelerationist / ecomodernist left: “Your flat, relational metaphysics is romantic. Only accelerating technology (nuclear fusion, geoengineering, AI optimization) escapes the dead end.”

Response: Trust in these solutions is symmetrical to the faith we critique. Nuclear fusion has been “always 30 years away” for 70 years; geoengineering entails unpredictable systemic risks (monsoon alteration, further acidification). Disobedience does not deny technology; it denies its neutrality vis-à-vis the power structure that generated it.

From indigenous / decolonial perspectives: "Your ecologism remains within the Western frame. You speak of 'planet' as abstract entity rather than specific lands violated by fossil colonialism."

Response: A rightful objection. Hence the proposed metaphysics (inspired by Coccia, Haraway, Morton) must translate into concrete alliances: Debt for Climate, support for Waorani struggles in Ecuador (2025 legal victory against extraction), alliances with Global South peasants against land grabbing for agrofuels.

From climate fatalists / collapsologists: "It is too late. Every action is theater. Prepare for collapse instead of deluding ourselves."

Response: Fatalism is the flip side of techno-optimism. Both evade present responsibility. Disobedience is not for "winning"; it is for not surrendering the present to resignation.

Aesthetics matters. In 2022–2024 the "orange shock" dominated: washable paint on monuments, soup on canvases, glue on shop windows. In 2025–2026 an evolution is noticeable:

immersive performance (Thijs Biersteker and multispecies installations rendering visible the human-vegetal-non-human entanglement, in line with Coccia and Mancuso);

theater of mourning (symbolic hunger strikes, human chains around dried rivers, silent processions with seeds to plant);

symbolic hacking (real-time IPCC data projections on public buildings, takeover of advertising screens with messages of "planetary friendship").

These forms shift the axis from scandal to shared pain. No longer merely disturbing; making felt, for an instant, the weight of loss already underway.

Open Conclusion – Disobedience as Secular Liturgy of Anticipatory Mourning [11],

At this point we may risk one final, concluding image.

Ecologically oriented civil disobedience, in its mature 2026 form, increasingly resembles a secular liturgy of anticipatory mourning.

It is not a liturgy of victory. Not a liturgy of mass conversion. It is a liturgy that says: "We are already within the mourning of many possible worlds—coral reefs, primary forests, stable ways of life for billions—and yet we continue to gather, to soil our hands, to risk legal peril, to create moments of suspension of normal flow, because we want someone, someday, to be able to say: 'At least some of them refused to pretend nothing was happening.'"

This liturgy needs no metaphysical certainty. It needs bodies willing to pay a small but visible price to keep open the possibility that the species not be reduced to the mere memory of its own rapacity.

Even if the future proves worse than feared—+2.7 °C by 2100 according to conservative 2025 projections—even if global mean temperatures exceed 3 °C by century's end, it would remain true that some human beings, in the name of an undemonstrable fidelity, chose not to join the chorus claiming "there was nothing to be done."

Perhaps it is not much.

Perhaps it is all that remains.

And perhaps, paradoxically, it is sufficient for climate disobedience to cease being a means toward an end and become instead a form of life—fragile, minoritarian, stubborn—that testifies that another way of inhabiting terrestrial finitude was at least attempted.

Despite everything.

Until the last breathable breath.

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