

BACHELOR'S THESIS EXAMINER REPORT
PPE – Bachelor's in Politics, Philosophy and Economics
Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University

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| Thesis title: | Justifying Civil Disobedience in the Context of the Climate Justice Protests in Germany |
| Student's name: | Leo Becker |
| Referee's name: | Václav Rut |

| Criteria | Definition | Maximum | Points |
|-----------------------|---|------------|--------|
| Major Criteria | | | |
| | Contribution and argument (quality of research and analysis, originality) | 50 | 45 |
| | Research question (definition of objectives, plausibility of hypotheses) | 15 | 15 |
| | Theoretical framework (methods relevant to the research question) | 15 | 11 |
| <i>Total</i> | | 80 | 71 |
| Minor Criteria | | | |
| | Sources, literature | 10 | 9 |
| | Presentation (language, style, cohesion) | 5 | 5 |
| | Manuscript form (structure, logical coherence, layout, tables, figures) | 5 | 5 |
| <i>Total</i> | | 20 | 19 |
| TOTAL | | 100 | 90 |

Plagiarism-check (URKUND) match score: 18

Although the score is somewhat high, it appears to come from correctly cited sources and as such does not constitute plagiarism.

Reviewer's commentary according to the above criteria:

The submitted thesis on the justification of civil disobedience for climate justice presents a highly relevant topic. Above all, the thesis is well structured and well written, at the level expected of a bachelor's thesis. However, I have reservations about some of the arguments and conclusions, which I will outline below.

The thesis makes the claim that the constitutional account is inadequate for accounting for climate justice civil disobedience and that the radical-democratic account is better suited

for such a task. Isn't it the case though that the constitutional account is simply a broader conceptualization of civil disobedience without much normative claims and a radical-democratic account is an extension of that approach building on the same grounds (defense of liberal democracy, liberalist check and balance, commitment to nonviolence)?

I agree with the critique of the constitutional account outlined in the thesis, but I am not convinced that the radical-democratic approach, as it is presented, is the best way to account for climate justice civil disobedience. Firstly, in this account "civil disobedience becomes an important political device, to hold democracies up to their commitment, of protecting minority groups" (p. 21). Who exactly is the minority group in environmental protests? Of course there are the Lakota people around the Dakota Access Pipeline, the residents of the Hambacher Forest, etc., but is it not the case that these protests are in the voice of the majority, fighting for a livable earth for all of us? This is not, in my opinion, a technical issue, but points to a larger dilemma regarding democracy, an issue that is unfortunately not discussed in the thesis, although it looms in the background. The author states that "voting and other traditional ways of influencing policy do not adequately reflect the urgency of climate action, and lobbying by large fossil fuel corporations further complicates effective policy change" (p. 28). This is a serious claim that should be at the heart of an argument about climate justice civil disobedience and its relationship to democracy. At times it seems that the author is justifying civil disobedience *for* the theories themselves, rather than for our democratic commitment or the urgency of climate collapse. While I understand that this is not the subject of the paper, there are exciting new ways of thinking about democracy that are part of the disobedience taking place and being conceived within these movements, especially Ende Gelände and similar horizontal direct actions.

The lack of theorizing about the relationship between democracy and civil disobedience is linked to a somewhat vague description of the "hidden tensions" that these protests tend to expose. "Civil disobedience brings buried injustices to the light, it is not responsible for creating tension, but rather confronts society about already existing tension in a

sometimes-uncomfortable way“ (p. 23). What is the nature of this tension? Is it an ever-present antagonism? Why have a democracy if it hides or suppresses these issues? This argument is quite loaded and invites further exploration, which should be nested in a robust theoretical and ontological perspective.

Another problem I see with the radical-democratic account as applied to climate justice is the question of nonviolence. The author explicitly states that he does not want to discuss the question of violence/nonviolence (p. 15). This is a pity, because this is a crucial issue when it comes to climate change. The author even quotes from Andreas Malm's *How to Blow Up a Pipeline*, but avoids discussing this highly controversial issue. As Malm notes, it may be time to start dismantling fossil fuel infrastructure or destroying climate-destroying luxury consumer products (such as SUVs or private jets). Above all, Malm makes the case that this is not only necessary, but *justified*, drawing on the theory and history of civil disobedience.

The third section on concrete climate justice movements in Germany is well written and argued, though I think it would benefit from a more robust theoretical account, taking into account some of the issues I mentioned above. I have minor doubts about the striking contrast in judgment the author draws between Fridays For Future and Letzte Generation. Aren't FFF's acts of civil disobedience also symbolic and primarily directed at the government (like the calls for politicians to "listen to the experts")? Also, the effectiveness of these different forms of protest is mostly to be seen, while the different public perception comes from a deliberate choice of the protesters (kids fighting for their future vs. a small number of activists creating public disturbance to be heard).

In conclusion, I recommend the thesis for defense and commend the author for tackling this topic. I hope the author continues to work on this topic and perhaps takes some of my notes into consideration, especially the need to theorize contemporary liberal democracy (perhaps through climate justice movements) in relation to climate collapse.

Proposed grade: B+ / A

Suggested questions for the defence are:

How does climate justice civil disobedience reflect on contemporary liberal democracy?

What is the exact nature of "hidden tensions" uncovered by these protests?

I recommend the thesis for final defence.



Referee Signature

Overall grading scheme at FSV UK:

| TOTAL POINTS | GRADE | Quality standard |
|--------------|-------|---|
| 91 – 100 | A | = outstanding (high honor) |
| 81 – 90 | B | = superior (honor) |
| 71 – 80 | C | = good |
| 61 – 70 | D | = satisfactory |
| 51 – 60 | E | = low pass at a margin of failure |
| 0 – 50 | F | = failing. The thesis is not recommended for defence. |