

A Conversation on Green Democracy

—Carme Melo Escrihuela &
Marcel Wissenburg

Dear Carme,

Just a thought to open this conversation: has anybody noticed that the goals of climate change policy have silently changed? From reversing the trend to capping output towards simply adapting to a constant rise in temperature and everything that comes with global warming? What better proof do we need that you cannot have a healthy planet *and* democracy? Or is my view too pessimistic? Have I become one of those grumpy old men like William Ophuls, who in his latest book, *Plato's Revenge: Politics in the Age of Ecology*, seems to argue that democracy will only work if we all have the 'right' preferences?

In the 1960s, the ecological crisis was either discovered (if you believe it is real) or invented (if you do not believe it is real). For the believers, the idea of a single global ecological crisis allows them to argue that there is one cause (or interconnected set of causes) for all environmental problems. That cause is humanity's short-sighted, self-

centred quest for material satisfaction. Call it greed, luxury, decadence, or Hobbesian fear of the Four Horsemen – but that is where the problem lies.

Among the crisis-mongers are some, like Ophuls, who believe that the present political institutions of liberal democracy are merely vessels for the expression and promotion of human selfishness. For them, there is no way democracy, however mitigated or adapted, can deal with the ecological crisis. If there is to be hope of salvation, it either has to come from other, not necessarily democratic, institutions like the market or a perfectionist authoritarian government, or it has to come from the individual: all humans undergoing a sudden change of heart, turning into anti-consumers living off an organic-vegan menu. Democracy is and always will be the expression of individual, non-reflective, intuitive, egotistical preferences. Democratic institutions will always force you to express those preferences even if you would prefer to express something else – because if

you do not aggressively defend your short-term interests you will lose to those who do. Hence, fighting the ecological crisis demands strong leaders, strong institutions, force, and if necessary violence to do what needs to be done – save humanity even at the cost of some individual freedom and perhaps some individuals. Otherwise the planet will hit back and kill us all: Gaia 1 – Democracy 0.

Then there are others. There are ‘ecologists’ (advocates of an ecology-friendly reform of society) who actually believe democracy – if properly adapted – may be a force for the good. The question for me is if they – people like Andrew Dobson, Robyn Eckersley, etcetera – do not want to throw away the baby with the bathwater. Their program of reform is so radical, it seems to me, that in the end they turn democracy into an instrument of indoctrination, or they sacrifice all the good that modern freedom adds to democracy (freedom of life style and from persuasion, etcetera). Or worse, they sacrifice all of liberty, or worst, they sacrifice both democracy and liberty – still maintaining they are fundamentally different from the authoritarian school because they defend the ‘objective’ self in us rather than force the Good through our throats whether we like it or not.

And finally there are those who are more or less neutral in regard to democracy. People who look for salvation elsewhere, like James Lovelock, who has been around for 40 years now, defending the so-called

‘technofix’: technological solutions that should at least lessen the crisis. I am also thinking of defenders of alternative institutions like free market environmentalists, and the friends of green consumerism, both of whom believe that the economy is the key.

In the end, no ‘green’ thinker seems to be a true fan of democracy as it is – so, Carme, let us find out why. Why should democracy be changed, and what should it become?

Best,
Marcel

Dear Marcel,

Certainly, existing institutions are not well equipped to deal with the ecological crisis. Democracy is, as you contend, part of the problem. However, the problem is not democracy as such, but actually existing democracy. That is: liberal representative democracy. It may be the case that what we need is not less but rather more and far better democracy. So why not Gaia 1 – Democracy 1?

Before we start playing this fascinating game – and investigating why democracy constitutes a problem and how it could instead be a solution – some clarifications should be made. What do we mean by ‘the environment’? What is it that a politics of sustainability, whether democratic or not, should be concerned with?

These questions can be approximated by looking at the distinction between 'environmentalism' and 'ecologism'. As you well know, the distinction was introduced by Andrew Dobson in 1990, in his *Green Political Thought*. Environmentalism, Dobson says, is based on a managerial treatment of the environment. It presupposes that problems can be addressed within the present social, political, and economic order, without significant transformations in values or production and consumption levels. Examples of environmentalism include, for instance, conservation and wise use of resources, pollution control, and recycling. Ecologism, by contrast, advocates radical changes in human relations with nature and in social and political institutions. According to Dobson, while ecologism is an ideology on its own – which cannot be fully captured by other ideologies like liberalism and socialism without the latter undergoing fundamental shifts – environmentalism is not an ideology, but a reformist approach to the environment – easy to be assimilated by mainstream politics as well as other ideologies.

The distinction between ecologism and environmentalism can be illustrated with reference to climate change. For environmentalists, the problem is basically viewed in terms of a bad use of technology in energy production; it requires, therefore, more efficiency in the application of technology and the development of new techniques like geo-engineering to bring down the Earth's temperature. According

to ecologists, climate change is rather a consequence of unbalanced relationships between the human and the non-human spheres. Thus it calls for a rethinking of the type of societies we want to live in and the values these should be built on.

What are the new sets of values and human-nature relations that the ideology and political program of ecologism draw on? First, ecologists accept the existence of natural limits to growth. The fact that we live on a finite planet sets limits on production and consumption as well as on the Earth's capacity to absorb pollution. Consequently, we need to decrease consumption and production levels, move beyond the paradigm of economic growth, and reject industrialism. These ideas cut across the capitalism-communism dichotomy: the problem is faith in unlimited growth, technological development and the industrial society, and both capitalism and communism have, in ecologists' views, been built upon such dogmas. Perhaps an important difference between ecologism and environmentalism, and between ecologism and approaches to the environment by other ideologies, is that these transformations in lifestyles and economic patterns towards a post-industrialist order are based on the idea that a less materialistic and less affluent society will be more rewarding, fulfilling, and a better place to live than consumer societies. Finally, ecologism defends a non-instrumental, non-anthropocentric conception of nature and uses non-

human centred arguments to justify why we need to protect biodiversity. By contrast, environmentalists do not generally accept limits to growth, do not typically reject industrialism, and do justify nature conservation policies in terms of human needs and interests.

These are important distinctions, as they influence the way we conceive sustainability and what we regard to be the aims of ecological/environmental politics. This, in turn, shapes the different attitudes towards the environment-democracy relationship that you illustrated, Marcel. So do you think we have settled the foundations of our debate enough so as to move on?

Yours,
Carme

Dear Carme,

Thanks for this elaboration. You are right, what ecologists and environmentalists brand as 'wrong' with liberal democracy is not that it is democratic, but that there is too little democracy in it. You are also right that the difference between environmentalism and ecologism is crucial. It is crucial for determining which aspects of democracy there is too little of *and* crucial for what an alternative, a greener, democracy should look like.

For environmentalists, the problem with liberal democracy is not that it is representative, but not representative

enough. From their point of view, there may not be an all-out ecological crisis, but there certainly are serious environmental problems with effects that cross borders (some are even global, e.g. climate change), economies (the North-South divide), and generations (sometimes dozens of generations: nuclear waste), and that demand temporary sacrifices for future benefits. If classic liberal democracy does one thing, it cumulates preferences that have nothing to do with, and are usually at odds with, the interests of future generations, other peoples, and other species. Democracy as we know it is *emocracy*: it is registering and responding to the momentary emotion of the single individual in the election booth, pitched against the rest of the world. Therefore, it is egoistic and short-sighted.

As a consequence, environmentalists defend at least three types of changes in representative democracy: constitutional limits to democratic decision-making, better representation of the disenfranchised, and adaptation of our preferences through 'information' and education. Constitutional limits should, for instance, ensure that natural resources are protected so as to ensure that future generations are left no worse off than we are, or an ombudsman for future generations should be installed. Better representation means that parties' platforms and MPs include sustainability, biodiversity, fair trade, and global justice in their economic policies, in the interest of the global poor and (again) future generations.

Better information and education means that we will know to vote 'the right way' and stalk our MPs when we are informed about (say) indigenous people being chased away, cuddly species being eradicated, plants with medical benefits being destroyed, and CO₂ purification being sabotaged, all by nasty greedy Brazilians or Indonesians cutting down the jungle for coffee farmers. (Of course we still buy their fair trade coffee.)

The problem with the environmentalist new and improved version of liberal democracy is, ecologists would say, that it does not take nature seriously. What environmentalism wants is a democracy that promotes sustainability. What it means by sustainability is the most efficient and effective possible exploitation of all natural resources – and that is where environmentalism makes a choice that is very hard to sell. It is all very noble to squeeze the most out of nature and distribute it as fairly as possible among present and future humans worldwide, but what it results in is what I call the problem of plastic trees. Imagine the Japanese produce plastic trees. They look like trees, smell like trees, feel like trees, you can use them as wood – no difference with real trees except that they are more efficient in turning CO₂ into O₂. If you care about humans and global warming and sustainability and all that, then your duty is clear: you are morally obliged to cut down every single tree on this planet and replace it by a plastic tree. There is something deeply disturbing

about the idea that sustainability demands the abolition of nature – but still, it is what environmentalism implies. Basically, the ecologist says, environmentalism is old wine in new bags. Ecologists do not deny that future generations matter, or that global justice matters – but, they say, we do not solve the problem of a shrinking cake by adding more eaters or by licking up ever more microscopic crumbs. We only make it worse that way.

Yours,
Marcel

Dear Marcel,

Thank you for your instructing depiction of environmentalists' approach to liberal democracy, to which you have contributed enormously with your work. It is true, as we both seem to agree, that ecologists would regard liberal democracy to be not democratic enough. However, it is no less true that they would consider a green liberal democracy to be still not compelling.

Take the environmental aspect of green liberal democracy. The instrumental and anthropocentric conception of nature held by environmentalists leads to an untenable notion of sustainability. Let us focus on your example of plastic trees. Here is a quite likely response from the ecologist perspective: (i) there will certainly be side-effects, unexpected consequences, as with

any technological innovation; (ii) the belief that environmental problems can be solved with technology still rests on the arrogant assumption that humans can know, predict, control and subdue nature (in other words, that we can play God); (iii) technology is expensive, so only those states (and corporations) in control of the technological means will enjoy the alleged benefits, and this will generate further global injustice; (iv) valuing a tree as a mere instrument to get wood or capture CO₂ deprives present and future generations of the possibility of valuing trees for their aesthetic or spiritual value; however, to leave future generations without these forms of appreciating nature does not appear to be consistent with a liberal environmentalism.

In short, what is at stake for ecologists, and what they expect from democracy, is not just the collective management of the improvement of the present state of the world at whatever cost. I believe that some things are non-negotiable for ecologists. Getting rid of what is left of the natural world to replace it by artifice is one of them. There is a way to mitigate some environmental problems without the abolition of nature, a solution that requires less, rather than more technology: decreasing production and consumption levels. This implies addressing the roots of the problem and reducing emissions, instead of keeping business-as-usual and then developing carbon capture technol-

ogies (like plastic trees) to clean up the mess. This, however, requires dramatic changes to the economic system that environmentalists are not eager to accept.

Now take the democratic element of green liberal democracy. Ecologists would contend that the three types of improvements of liberal democracy that environmentalists advocate – and that you summarized – are insufficient. Ecological – as different from green liberal – democracy would set constitutional limits, not just on extraction of natural resources, but also on private property rights and capital accumulation. It would not only seek the representation of environmental concerns, but the representation of nature itself, with its own interests different from ours, and even its own rights. Finally, ecologists would also contend that citizens need to have better access to environmental information, not however to vote in the right way, but to have their meaningful say in environmental decision-making processes.

Environmentalists' reform of liberal democracy seems to me an empty form of democratic politics, which seeks to implement democracy without the people and achieve sustainability without nature. The ecologists' alternative to green liberal democracy is an ecological democracy that not only pays attention to processes (representation) and political institutions (constitutions, rights), but to the values, objectives, and rationale of

democratic arrangements. It does not merely strive to solve, politically and democratically, environmental problems, but to change the way we think about the environment. For a culture of sustainability to spread, emphasis is put on the public sphere as a means for changing dominant (industrialist) discourses. Yet, the formal institutions of the state have an important role to play in this picture too, as legal and democratic mechanisms would have to include nature as a subject of politics regardless of the views of those taking part in the democratic process. These ecologically-oriented mechanisms would be deliberative and participatory, so that informed citizens would be able to directly affect policies.

No doubt many environmentalists will say that this account is not only utopian, but that it threatens state neutrality and some of the sacrosanct individual freedoms and rights. Well, it goes without saying that ecological democracy generates its own problems.

Yours,
Carme

Dear Carme,

There is so much to respond to... I have problems with ecologism's conception of nature as having intrinsic value, and ecologism's critique of environmentalist 'resourcism' bugs me as well. I have been offended, from the first day since I read this kind of argument, by the suggestion

that there is anything wrong with redesigning nature: that we would be 'playing God' is a critique wasted on an atheist Dutchman, obviously. Gaia may have created the Earth, but we created the Netherlands and we did a damn sight better than her.

But I will limit myself to two serious problems relating to the ecologists' plans for democracy.

(1) The representation of nature. Let us assume (against my better instincts) that there really is something seriously wrong with 'resourcism', with viewing nature as resources. Then I would have to agree that representing nature as an object of politics is an improvement on the past, but still a totally insufficient improvement. I can imagine various ways to represent nature: limit the agenda of democratic decision-making through constitutional rights for nature; appoint wards or ombudspersons who test laws for their contribution to ecological sustainability and if necessary reject them; create a special house in parliament for representatives of nature – I can imagine all of that and more. Still, in the end: what is it that all of these humans are supposed to represent? What is nature? What is it but a social construction? Is there really an ecosystem, or is life on this planet simply a series of chemical reactions gone berserk? Is it a system aiming for harmony, or is harmony an Aristotelian dream? Is it aimed at evolution, development, change, challenge, perhaps even anarchy (as the laws of thermodynamics suggest)?

And talking laws of nature... what kind of Thomistic flummery is it to suggest that just because something is the case it should be the case, that just because nature would want (say) harmony we should strive for harmony? Have we still not evolved beyond superstition and – oh, what an ironically appropriate term – naturalism?

(2) Wishful thinking and circular reasoning. Both of these seem to be required for the truly, madly, deeply green alternative for liberal democracy to work. The wishful thinking bit is evident in the delusion that more democracy will result in greener policies; the circular reasoning hides behind the expectation that more democracy of the right kind can ensure greener preferences. The only way that more deliberative and participatory democracy will result in (the choice for ‘the actualization of’ requires an extra step: a civil service embracing a green conviction) greener policies is if people (a) develop sensibly green preferences in the process of deliberation and (b) give those enlightened preferences precedence over the immediate, egotistical preferences that liberal democracy now incites them to express. I will grant you (b), though it is irrational, but not (a). That is where circular reasoning comes in.

Why would we expect more participation and deliberation, and more neutral information, to lead to citizens developing greener preferences than they would otherwise have?

Honestly, even John Barry does not believe that, and he is one of the biggest names in Academia and leader of the Northern Ireland Green Party; very few have a broader perspective. Barry is aware of the extremely careful research into the effects of deliberation on democratic decision-making performed by James Fishkin – who concludes that, while citizens develop far more elaborate and sensible justifications for their views through deliberative procedures, their preferences themselves rarely change. In Barry’s words, NIMBY (Not In My Back Yard) becomes NOPE (Not On Planet Earth). In my words – well, my point is merely that more democracy does not imply greener preferences; therefore it does not imply greener citizens. In other words: more democracy will lead to greener choices, but only if the process starts with greener preferences...

... And that, I suspect, is why ecologists bring in other weapons to ensure only green preferences are expressed (thus creating a circular argument): constitutional provisions protecting nature, limits on property rights (which, by the way, I also support), representation of other species, nature itself, and future generations (all of course also part of the repertoire of environmentalism, i.e., the dark side) – and so on...

To conclude: while I do not exclude that there may be good reasons to ‘fix’ people’s preferences, I do object to ‘fixing’ itself. It is and always will be a violation of human authentic-

ity and autonomy. Even if you are not a liberal and hate freedom, that is still something to worry about: in these happy times of mass democracy, rulers of any political system, democratic or tyrannical, end up tied to the weeping willows (and rightly so) if they systematically ignore the will of the people.

Thus, if we want the deep green life (and that is a big if) with reduced consumption, sustainable production, and respect for nature, we should forget about democracy, improved or not. What we need is Ophulsian authoritarianism, Star Trek technology along the lines of Lovelock, and a really, really huge reduction of the population.

Yours,
Marcel

Dear Marcel,

I have to admit that you are right, to some extent, in your accusations. Certainly, the green democratic project is fuelled by wishful thinking and ecologists are often reminded that they have to be realistic. Nevertheless, are calls for more realism and less wishful thinking not just attempts to convince nonconformists that there is no alternative to the status quo? Perhaps environmental sustainability requires, precisely, a combination of wishful thinking and imagination. Wishful thinking to believe that this world can be a better place without the exploitation of

the natural environment, and with reduced levels of consumption and production. Imagination to envisage different paths that we, humans, can still consciously take. Green political theory should keep this in mind.

What would be the non-democratic – or democratically dubious – alternatives that those concerned with the preservation of ecosystems' integrity are left with, if you will not let them rely on democracy? I can think of increasing the power of (1) the state, (2) the market, and (3) the individual as other vehicles for sustainability.

(1) I will begin with the state. States are increasingly using their administrative, institutional, and legislative competences to enlarge environmental protection and encourage ecological behavior. If further developed, this process could culminate in an ecological state able to restrict, for instance, property rights, and place limits on access to resources. For ecologists, this is a democratic and ethical organization, like Robyn Eckersley's Green State. Such a state is informed by an ecological democracy that implements participatory mechanisms and articulates constitutional provisions aimed at risk prevention and the promotion of environmental and social justice. Decreasing consumption and production will have drastic effects on welfare, employment, trade, and wealth generation. People who do not see the benefits of a more frugal life will suffer, and it will be difficult for

some citizens to be democratically persuaded (i.e. through debate) of the changes in lifestyles required. For those like Lovelock and Ophuls, who see democracy as the problem, ecological management points at a Leviathan-type of state.

(2) Then, the market. Proponents of market-based solutions believe that ecological and economic interests are compatible and can be advanced simultaneously. Free-market environmentalists see property rights and the market as the appropriate locus to fight the battle for environmental protection, arguing that the market responds better and faster to environmental demands than state control or democratic decision-making. If the environment was properly converted into private property, and rights to resources and pollution were well established – the argument goes – polluters would be encouraged to limit pollution and resource owners would take far better care of (their privately owned) natural resources. An example of this approach is emission trading, based on providing fiscal incentives for the reduction of polluting emissions. From an ecologist perspective, this is a problematic solution. Not only because it instrumentalizes and commodifies nature (viewed as a good to be traded), but also because it generates inequalities and is not effective. Corporations with greater resources can buy more emission permits, and soon the emission trade becomes a juicy business that reinforces unjust relationships.

Carbon credits allow companies to maintain their production levels; hence they do not guarantee a decrease in resource input. Moreover, when too many emission credits are issued cheaply or freely, as it often happens to be the case, polluting firms are discouraged from reducing emissions. Paradoxically, this can act as an incentive to continue polluting.

(3) Last but not least, the individual. It may be argued that sustainability requires a moral revolution, a shift in individual consciousness that leads people to think about the common good instead of their particular, self-centered interests. The idea is that if people change their own conceptions of nature, and if they voluntarily decide to reduce consumption and adopt sustainable practices like recycling and driving fewer cars, significant transformations will take place. Some may refer to this as a form of ecological citizenship, but citizenship is political, not moral; it is not just about individual isolated acts, it is also about collective action and the common good. Personal transformation will be futile without wider institutional changes at the economic and social levels that provide the framework for individual practices to be meaningful political acts instead of moral heroic endeavors. This collective requirement of citizenship has a democratic dimension.

To sum up: although more democracy does not necessarily equal a green world, less democracy worsens the

problem and allows authoritarian rule and/or the market to take over the people. The question now is: how can we get citizens to act as ecological citizens and to think about the sustainability of the common good? Democratic participation and debate may not, as you rightly indicate, do the job of preference transformation. The inner moral revolution upheld by some deep greens is also problematic, as it lacks an institutional dimension. But will the fiscal incentives of the market promote greener citizens or greener consumers? Would techno-fixes and authoritarian governments leave any room for citizen initiative, or would they generate passive, obedient subjects?

Democracy... it may not be the panacea, but it is the most noble and honest alternative.

Yours,
Carme

Dear Carme,

I agree, by and large, with your analysis of the alternatives for more and greener democracy: they are indeed in most respects not viable. However, I do not think I can share your conclusions. In particular, I do not think a green (ecological) democracy is the way forward. I still see green (environmentalist) alternatives resulting in a world that seeks a balance between immediate human interests and prudent, parsimonious nature management and a democracy that takes its responsibility for the natural environment seriously.

For the sake of brevity, I will not expand on this point. While we may deeply disagree about the range and depth of the changes needed in existing democracies, I think we can agree on two things. For one, I believe we agree that existing representative democracy is hopelessly incapable of representing anything other than the sum total of all human short-term, egoistic, voracious, non-reflective preferences. Secondly, I think we agree that alternatives developed in mainstream democratic theory by mainstream academics and mainstream politicians – in particular improvements of the deliberative and participatory aspects of existing democracies – are perhaps necessary but by no means sufficient to ensure even the shallowest form of environmental sustainability. It is always good to keep in mind who the real fools are: neither one of us.

Let me begin by agreeing that free market environmentalism is no alternative for democracy (be it your type of democracy or mine). Like you say, money rules at the expense of those who would protect nature, not to mention a zillion other problems with the free market. One greedy bastard buying one per cent of a forest and building a road there can be enough to completely destroy a fragile ecosystem. Then again... there are ways in which ecologists can (and do) use the free market quite creatively to obstruct big business.

As far as I am concerned, the basic problem with free market environmentalism is the concept of property – again we agree. This problem can be

cured. As I have been arguing for the past 25 years, ownership of something (say, a forest) does not necessarily give you the right to destroy it, let alone destroy it at any cost by any means (say, an air-polluting fire) and in doing so destroy other goods (say, the clean air previously produced for all of us by the forest). Reconsidering limits to ownership in the light of new evidence (like the surprisingly recent discovery that our planet is really physically finite) may give new life to the free market as an instrument of environmental protection.

The root of all problems with democracy and any alternative to it is the individual. No political system can consistently and for a long period move against the will of the people, not once those same people have tasted freedom and its fruits. No government, green or other, will ever be able to forcibly re-impose frugality on the billions who for the first time in human history do *not* have to fear starvation, pestilence, war, and death each and every day of their short, nasty and British lives. That is also why a green state and a green democracy à la Eckersley are impossible – the idea is not just utopian in the sense of idealistic (there is nothing wrong with pointing the way forward to an ideal) but utopian in the sense of downright impossible. A government that economizes ten per cent on pensions these days does not just risk its parliamentary survival – its members risk their real lives as well when they turn up in public. What a green state needs is a far, far greater sacrifice: we are talking

about quickly reducing the world's population by fifty per cent, reducing the remainders' welfare by another fifty, and completely changing their tastes and attitudes.

I have always deeply admired Karl Popper's sincere and sensible defense of piecemeal engineering, of bit by bit changing the world, as an alternative for utopian projects that can only end in tears, or worse, blood and tears. My environmental democracy is and remains a liberal democracy with all its shortcomings. No ecologically sustainable society is possible if its members do not want it; and the way to change their attitudes and preferences is not by patronizing them, herding them, or bulldozing them – but by making them discover for themselves what is right and what is wrong, what is prudent and what is plain stupid. If that does not work, then Gaia really deserves to win the match.

The last word is yours now,
Marcel

Dear Marcel,

We definitely agree on the inadequacy of representative institutions to deal with sustainability requirements. We also share the view that alternatives proposed by mainstream politics fail to address environmental questions satisfactorily – not even satisfactorily enough for environmentalists. I also believe that your diagnosis of the key problem is entirely correct: governments – whether more or less demo-

cratic, more or less green – will have a hard time making citizens undertake radical changes in lifestyles, unless individuals identify with the values and aims that those changes aim at.

How could we possibly convince people who are not yet convinced? A good starting point may be to lead by example: those who are persuaded should no longer wait for formal democracies to do the job. They should live ecological lives and hope that their conduct will inspire others – probably we also agree on this argument. This is not to say that green politics should just be a form of life politics. Rather, I think that it should have a more oppositional, institutional and collective dimension – to which I will return.

My point is that, although the individual may be one of the main problems, as you note, in the absence of political will among the ruling class and economic elites, the power of citizens acting jointly may be one of the most promising solutions. If ecological democracy is ever to come about, given the current state of affairs it seems more reasonable to assume that this will be due to citizen action, rather than the result of governmental initiative. Ecological democracy may be the only way forward for some of us, but the ecological state is not its only, not even its main, actor. Yet let us not put the cart before the horse.

We have not yet elucidated why ecologists should endorse democracy, given the uncertainty of ecological

outcomes, and the lack of guarantee that it will trigger transformations of individual preferences. Ecologism might not necessarily need democracy to realize its goals, but it surely needs democratization. Because of the connection between environmental and social problems (illustrated, for instance, by the way ecological risks fall disproportionately on the poor), and the existence of power relations in human interactions with the natural world (with the exploitation of nature being a tool used by some individuals and groups to dominate others), democratization of societies and their economies seems to be a *sine qua non* to put an end to the plundering of natural resources and redress some of the negative consequences of environmental problems. Although I am prepared to accept – like many ecologists are – that there is not an inescapable connection between democracy and ecological results/preferences, I still think that the social aspect of environmental matters allows ecologists to make a strong case for democracy. We must examine the issue from the other side, too. That is, what does ecologism have to say about the future of democracy? It is time to recapitulate what ecological thought adds to democratic theory and practice and what makes it different from other notions of democracy – including your liberal environmentalism.

First, ecological politics strives for the democratic inclusion and moral considerability of the non-human world. It challenges the primacy of

anthropocentrism, instrumental reasoning, and resourcism. It may be fair to say that no other democratic project is based on these premises. Second, ecological democracy is based on a relational or social conception of autonomy that transcends the atomized individual typical of some forms of liberal democracy. At this point, ecologism converges with communitarianism but adds to this the stress not only on social relations, but also on humans' direct contact with and dependence on nature. Third, ecologism pursues the democratic inclusion of economic decisions and the sphere of those traditionally thought of as private relations, on the grounds that these are political decisions and hence should be the object of democratic debate. This concern resonates with movements advocating for deeper, more authentic, legitimate, and real democracy. Nevertheless, what is characteristic of ecologism is the politicization of human-nature interactions in the economic and private domains.

Some of the likely elements of ecological democracy include a green public sphere, ecological citizenship, the eco-state, and environmental justice. It is important to note the centrality of civil society and the public sphere for green politics, a politics for which social movements and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are as crucial as political parties, a politics for which there is much more than parliaments and formal structures of government. In fact, green movement activities go beyond lobbying

states and/or corporations. They seek cultural transformation: changes of discourses in the public sphere, shifts in people's relationships with nature and technology. This cultural metamorphosis is seen as a precondition for changes in the political system. That is why a key challenge for ecological democracy – and for ecologists in general – is to find the right balance between the state, civil society, and citizens. As I noted earlier, ecological thought demands a sort of life politics focused on how to live daily life, but it also requires a justice-based politics (a more explicitly 'political' form of politics) aimed at defending the interests of traditionally subordinated human and non-human groups: the disadvantaged, the poor, future generations, animals, and plants.

Ecological democracy seeks to redress injustice as much as it seeks to change daily habits. This makes it a democratic alternative for those preoccupied with environmental degradation and the reduction of nature to a mere means that is characteristic of modern life. It is also an option for those troubled by the inequalities generated by the political and economic orders. Despite the many obstacles its implementation will have to face, it is a path to a fairer, more connected, and sustainable future.

Yours,
Carme