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An Imaginary Solution?
The Green Defence of Deliberative Democracy[1]

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ABSTRACT

As part of the recent rethinking of green politics, the construction of a green democracy has been subjected to increasing scrutiny. There is a growing consensus around deliberative democracy as the preferred model for the realisation of the green programme. As a result several arguments emerge when deliberative principles and procedures are to be justified from a green standpoint. This paper offers a critical assessment of the green case for deliberative democracy, showing that deliberation is being asked to deliver more than it is able to. However, it is suggested that the connection between sustainability, understood as a normative principle, and deliberative procedures may ultimately offer the best grounds for such a defence.

KEYWORDS

Green politics, deliberative democracy, sustainability, expertise, judgement

MANUEL ARIAS-MALDONADO

1. INTRODUCTION: GREEN POLITICS AND DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY.

The gradual broadening of green political theory in recent years is an outcome of its natural evolution. The reflective maturity of green thinking has involved a slow detachment from both its naturalist foundation and radical dogmatism. From the second half of the 1990s, a number of works began to question some of its traditional features – such as the influence of naturalism, or the role of anarchism in shaping its political strategy (cf. Hayward, 1998; Barry, 1999; Torgerson, 1999). Hence the grounds for green politics have been increasingly submitted to criticism. This is largely an internal criticism on the part of green theorists, of their own concepts, ideas and value commitments (Humphrey, 2001: 2); it is, in other words, a revolt 'against the traditional authoritarian and dogmatic aspects of traditional green political thought' (Levy, 2004: 48). Andrew Dobson himself, in the introduction to the third edition of his seminal work, confirms this displacement of green theory, not now focused so much on the ideological-political sides of environmentalism as on the traditional concepts of political theory, such as democracy, justice and citizenship (Dobson, 2000: ix). It is from this standpoint that the formerly unthinkable green approximation to liberalism, in search of some kind of concurrence between them, makes sense (cf. Vincent, 1998; Wissenburg, 1998; Barry and Wisenburg, 2001; Wissenburg and Levy, 2004).

Likewise, a debate has opened up on the construction of a green democratic model. Here, resistance coming from the naturalist interpretation of green politics, i.e., the attribution of normative meaning to nature, continues to clash with the democratising aims of its political theory. This is due to the contradictions provoked by naturalism's pre-political grounding of values and principles such as sustainability (cf. Doherty and de Geus, 1996; De-Shalit, 2000; Minteer and Pepperman Taylor, 2002). This rethinking of green politics does not guarantee the final extinction of naturalist green environmentalism, which is politically inclined to anti-statism and radical, essentialist communitarianism. However, it seems clear that through dialogue with other theoretical traditions, green political theory is now moving beyond the suffocating circle of naturalism. It is a move that should be welcomed.

The democratising tendency in green political theory has from the start been associated with increased interest in deliberative democracy. When theorists are asked about the kind of democracy best suited for dealing with green concerns, the consensus is clear: some version of deliberative democracy (cf. Jacobs, 1997; Eder, 1995; Barry, 1999; Dryzek, 2000; Eckersley, 2000, 2004). Such a deliberative turn parallels discussions about democratic theory, so there is nothing to be surprised at. It is simply part of a larger picture. However, a green defence of deliberative democracy should not be limited to the goal of deepening democracy, for that is a widespread ideal sufficiently defended by

democratic theorists. Whether to accept or to refuse deliberative democracy as the basis for a green democracy should more properly depend on specifically green arguments on its behalf. We do not look for a *democratic* justification of deliberative democracy, which can be found outside green theory, but rather for a *green* one. A deliberative articulation of green politics serves the cause of its modernisation, in spite of the flawed grounds on which it is sometimes defended.

2. REASONS FOR A GREEN DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY

This paper will explore the case for deliberative democracy from a green perspective – an exploration from which more general problems in deliberative procedures and principles will emerge. Outlined below are the main arguments to be found for a green defence of deliberative democracy, followed by a conclusion that assesses the general case for deliberative democracy in green theory and suggests a stronger way of linking deliberative and green politics.

2.1. Green values will emerge more easily in a deliberative context

The open nature of a deliberative procedure, whose argumentative and rational orientation facilitates the persuasive and ordered exposition of all values and preferences, would suppress the distortions of liberal political process and allow the emergence of green values because of their objective rational appeal. This is the epistemological-pragmatic argument: deliberation transcends the fallible and limited standpoints of participants, making good use of the knowledge, experiences and abilities of others (cf. Smith, 2001: 73). Discursive democracy is intrinsically more open to the kind of ethical reasoning we find in green thinking. Deliberation would perform a *releasing* function for environmental concerns which, however strong, usually remain latent (Niemeyer, 2004: 348). In fact, those options aimed at preserving ecological integrity are best placed in the Habermasian 'ideal speech situation', as an obvious and generalisable interest, for human survival depends on it (cf. Dryzek, 1990: 55). The preconditional quality of the environment is thereby invoked. What we find here is the presumption that the supposed greater reasonableness of a deliberative frame is equivalent to the acceptance of environmental protection once human dependence has been recognised. The problem is, however, that protection of the environment is an interest which, once *admitted*, must nonetheless be discussed along with all other interests.

This unavoidable limitation concerns all green values in the deliberative frame: the priority which environmentalism places on them is no different from that placed on their own conceptions of the good by other participants. There is no guarantee that ecological values will have to be embraced as a result of free

and equal conversations, for that very process might also provoke their banishment: it is fair to say that this wariness has become commonplace in recent green thinking (cf. Dobson, 1993: 198; Zwart, 2003; Smith, 2004; Mills and King, 2004: 81). Yet it is also true that the very nature of deliberation increases the opportunities for those values to be considered and rationally weighed, so that deliberative democracy is, in principle, a more favourable frame for their social acceptance. However, it cannot be assumed that environmental problems are going to be included in the agenda for deliberation. Hence Hayward proposes to protect those interests which are determined to be legitimate, for instance through constitutional provisos, *before* the process of exchange and transformation of preferences and interests begins (cf. Hayward, 1998: 164). This would certainly be a safer way of protecting environmental goods. However, the very determination of public interests *qua* public is itself a matter for deliberation and should be previously discussed. Hayward's restriction is introduced according to a specific conception of the good, hence becoming a restriction on deliberation – since the latter might decide not to consider environmental goods at all. In other words, although deliberation can be restricted on certain grounds, the one proposed here fails to embody the general character of the constitutional devices which would be accepted without betraying the aims of the deliberative process. There are many ways to consider the environment and they must be open to deliberation.

First excursus: *the problem of preferences*.
The argument so far is based on the premise that the deliberative model goes beyond preference aggregation, to enhance the discussion and transformation of preferences in the course of deliberation – a problematic presumption. Its normative character is undeniable: deliberative theorists *expect* such a transformation to take place, but they have probably taken it for granted. Defence of democratic deliberation needs to take account of current thinking on practical reasoning and political motivation, which suggests that it is not reasonable to expect citizens to dramatically change their preferences through deliberation (Johnson, 2001: 222). On this account, citizens *should* open their preferences to a process of comparison, discussion and, if rational valuation recommends it, transformation. However, the possibility that a public conflict of subjective preferences is reproduced in the deliberative frame cannot be discounted, thus hindering the achievement of consensual outcomes (Mills and King, 2000: 141). This is not necessarily a problem in itself, as long as the need for a final agreement and the practical impossibility of permanently extending the debate already demands the existence of voting in a deliberative procedure. But the possible resistance of citizens to *truly* exposing their preferences to debate and interaction is more problematic – and reluctantly only the educative potential of deliberative processes can be trusted here.

   As mentioned, a different problem is the social and institutional context in which those preferences are born, assuming they are not spontaneously given

to every individual (cf. O'Neill, 1997: 83). The contextual origin of preferences that are later incorporated into the deliberative process drives us in turn to one of the 'pathologies of deliberation' as described by Susan Stokes (2001): induced preferences. According to this old suspicion, citizens would never be aware of their own choices – imposed on them from above and pre-determined in social discourses which they adopt in ignorance of their true selves. However, induction of preferences can potentially occur at any moment and in any direction. We should expect well-informed citizens, involved in the processes of public deliberation, to be able to reflect upon the nature and origin of their own preferences. Moreover, whether those preferences are authentic or induced is irrelevant, as soon as their real interaction and transformation takes place, through their translation to public language and reasoning. However, deliberation does not equal removal of power nor the struggle for it. Limited expectations should therefore be placed on the transformation of preferences as a way to thoroughly solve conflicts of value and interest.

2.2. The inclusive character of deliberative democracy makes possible the incorporation of traditionally excluded actors and voices into the democratic process

Equality entails that everybody enjoys an equal opportunity to be listened to throughout the deliberative procedure, in order for the approaches and perspectives within deliberation to be multiplied – hence giving room to under-represented actors and interests in the liberal political process. To Hayward, discursive democracy is a necessary condition for the realisation of green values, inasmuch as only in a culture where humans are used to listening to each other will there be any hope of paying attention to nature's complaints (Hayward, 1995: 209).) The inclusiveness of deliberative procedures and the very nature of debate foster an 'enlarged thinking', able to incorporate the deliberation of the interests of the natural world, as long as it includes the 'imaginative representation' of situations and perspectives of others in the process of formulating, defending or discussing the proposed collective norms (Eckersley, 2000: 121). The argument runs as follows: moral considerability of the natural world is not derived from its linguistic competence, but from its self-ruling ability. The former requires that its inability to communicate is complemented by human individuals who internalise nature's interests: discursive democracy not only *allows* vicarious representation of underrepresented agents, but truly *insists* on it (Eckersley, 1998). Such representation is supposed to find an adequate vehicle in a model of democracy which does not restrict in advance the issues to be debated, nor the participants. The larger the number of people who are to intervene in the debate, the greater the probability that some one or more of them *are* able to internalise nature's interests. Discursive democracy creates a situation in which those initially distant interests are listened to and hence given consideration (Goodin,

MANUEL ARIAS-MALDONADO

1996: 847). Participants would be forced to consider the effects of their decisions on social and ecological communities, 'within as well as *beyond* the formal demos' (Eckersley, 2004: 133). However, the argument is again flawed, due to the unpredictable character of the debate and its possible outcomes: to listen to is not necessarily to embrace. The inclusion of interests and voices previously excluded from the political process does not lead to their automatic acceptance – even though the political and institutional context is more favourable.

The inclusiveness of deliberative democracy would also permit the enlargement of the political community through the embodiment of the natural world. To such end, communication as well as communicative rationality would be extended to entities capable of performing as agents, in spite of their lack of self-consciousness bound to subjectivity. The recognition of nature's agency would guarantee due respect for natural goods and ecological processes. Natural signs would then be treated with the same consideration agreed upon for human signs. Verbal communication cannot be extended to the natural world, but non-verbal ways of communication may suffice, especially if *silence* is also paid attention to in the deliberative process (cf. Dryzek, 1995: 21; 2000: 149). However, the natural signs that Dryzek is alluding to are perceived and interpreted by mankind and discussed by human participants when incorporated into deliberative frames: otherwise nature's voice would barely be audible. The absence of a common language entails an unavoidable distance from nature and animals, leading to their exclusion (cf. Berger, 2001: 11). It is humans who give meaning to the silence of nature. As Valéry said: 'There always exists a surmise making sense of the strangest language' (Válery, 1993: 238). Human mediation does not work here as a simple transmission of information: to a great extent it *produces* a set of valuations later subjected to deliberation. Mediation is not just unavoidable, but also decisive. A social system cannot communicate to a natural system: communication is merely possible *within* social systems *about* those other natural systems (cf. Luhmann, 1989). Democracy, as a discursive practice, is inexorably human. Such an emphasis on communication, rather than deliberation, points to further problems in deliberative democracy, precisely related to the latter.

Second excursus: *deliberation, exclusion, decision.*
Deliberative democracy, against its own foundation, contains a strong potential for exclusion. Paradoxically enough, this is due to the nature of that practice which lies at its very centre: deliberation. The presumption that all citizens are free and equal to publicly deliberate in order to achieve more legitimate and rational collective decisions ignores the fact that deliberation is in itself an exclusionary practice. To deliberate is to build up arguments and to defend them through speech, persuading others of their value by rhetorical means, together with a proper understanding and assessment of the other arguments: it is not just to speak, nor to converse. It may be that not all citizens have the same ability to deliberate in this sense (cf. Bell 1999: 74; Hardin, 1999: 116). If rational

argumentation is stressed, those who have trouble in limiting themselves to this kind of communication may be excluded. In the same way, as Iris Marion Young has pointed out, norms of deliberation are not neutral – assertive and confrontational discourse is much more valued than tentative, exploratory or conciliatory discourse**,** revealing how the rule of the best argument re-introduces power into democratic debate, leading to an agonistic view of the public sphere: 'deliberation is competition' (Young, 1996: 123). As a consequence of this competitive bias and of the former rationalistic inclination, deliberation adopts an elitist and exclusionary character for those individuals or groups with less capacity for developing a given type of discourse, or whose ways of understanding and expression are not the ones privileged in the deliberative frame. The need to correct that exclusionary bias of deliberation has given rise to proposals aimed at reinforcing inclusion, as well as oriented to an actual communication *beyond* deliberation – the former being, after all, a condition of the latter (cf. Young, 1996, 1997; Dryzek, 2000). Its implementation will require greater support for excluded groups and greater economic equality as well as the acceptance of different ways of communication apart from rational argumentation.

However, equal deliberation for all would also require something that *cannot* be guaranteed: equal 'epistemological authority' in rational and persuasive formulation of arguments, so that everybody has the same opportunity to convince others, not being then disadvantaged from the outset due to their rhetorical inabilities (cf. Sanders, 1997: 349). This is an unsolved problem in deliberative theory. The imbalance of intellectual skills among people remains an obstacle to equal deliberation. Is that something that can be solved through education, or is it merely an unavoidable human feature? In a representative frame, decisions are taken by a group of individuals previously elected – supposedly possessing similar epistemological authority. But how can the singular outcome of a debate in which some individuals dominate through rhetoric and persuasiveness be considered legitimate? Indeed, the idea that communicative rationality should rule every deliberation can be contested, for the fact that communicative rationality is a presupposition of deliberation does not make it always and everywhere a requirement. Moreover, to introduce arguments in terms of public language in the deliberative context does not necessarily mean they are free of instrumental motivation (Elster, 1997: 17). After all, linguistic expression does not lead automatically to the suppression of strategic attitudes – especially when public reasoning can just disguise them (Cohen, 2001: 250). Deliberative institutions process and translate unconventional communication, turning it into public language and argumentative grammar, in order for political deliberation and decision making to be viable. In that sense, *argumentation* should be stressed as the characteristic mode of expression in political debate, inasmuch as this is, above all, a contest about values and norms whose validity cannot ultimately be *proved*, but simply *justified* (Manin, 1987: 353–4). Thereby, it is true that democracy has to do with *real* communication (cf. Dryzek, 1997:

MANUEL ARIAS-MALDONADO

200). However, it cannot be merely about communication: it has to go beyond it to be part of a *political* system – communication must lead to decisions.

2.3. Deliberative democracy is the best institutional arrangement for developing ecological citizenship

The attention paid in recent years to traditional political concepts by green theory is aimed at their re-interpretation in an ecological key, as a means of moving towards a sustainable society. This is why the convergence with liberalism is taking place: the greening of institutions essential to liberal democracy would equal the greening of society – hence green criticism turns its attention to rights, autonomy, representation and citizenship. Citizenship is especially interesting due to the intermediate position it occupies in the relationship between individuals and the state. Sustainability has to do with the state and its citizens: the general management of the former requires the involvement of the latter in its formulation and practice. Yet it is not only a matter of citizen cooperation in the implementation of environmental policies: sustainability is a normative principle which should be submitted to public and democratic definition – instead of being left to a pre-determined technocratic or ideological constitution (cf. Arias-Maldonado, 2000). Therefore, the reinforcement of citizenship leads to the recognition of something that early environmentalism failed to see: how sustainability and the reshaping of social-environmental relationships are *political* rather than moral questions (cf. Barry, 1999: 67). The normative condition of sustainability demands the constitution of democratic frames of deliberation and decision, where citizen participation makes possible a decision-making process about issues whose uncertainty hinders the adoption of any technocratic or ideological approach. A deliberative institution appears to be the most adequate political arrangement for ecological citizenship. This deliberative frame requires an active view of citizenship, in which citizens' experiences and judgments are incorporated into the public domain, and a mutual respect and understanding among them is encouraged (Smith, 2000: 32). Ecological citizenship cannot then exist without deliberative politics – and green politics cannot achieve sustainability without the presence of both, whereby its normative condition is given due recognition.

Third excursus: *the institutionalisation of ecological citizenship and its limits*. The vindication of a citizenship more related to active participation in decision making and formulation of public policies is a classic claim in the history of political thinking – as well as a dominant feature of contemporary political theory, sometimes even from within liberal philosophy itself. That is why a green conception of citizenship cannot simply defend a deepening of democracy, but must do so in connection with its political goals: it should defend a truly *green* citizenship. The democratisation of sustainability offers that connection. The normative condition of the latter requires its public definition, made possible

by the participation of citizens in democratic deliberations: green politics, deliberation and citizenship are then linked – we shall come back to this below. However, ecological citizenship does possess an additional dimension which turns out to be more difficult to fit into deliberative politics: its emphasis on duties and responsibilities (cf. Dobson, 2003). A liberal view of citizenship can be seen as related to the individual satisfaction of preferences in the private sphere, given that liberal citizens claim their rights in the public sphere but fulfil their obligations and actively participate in the private one. Therefore, duty and obligation stem from contractual logic, and any appearance of them apart from the maximisation of individual interest and a cost-benefit dynamic is attributed to an isolated action of *care* (cf. Fraser and Gordon, 1994: 101). Ecological citizenship turns this scheme upside down. What distinguishes ecological citizenship is the relationship between citizens and the natural world, a relationship that excludes reciprocity and hence contractual logic; and the same goes for the often invoked bond between citizens and future generations. We cannot expect anything in return from restraining our consuming habits or protecting more carefully our surroundings; nothing, at least, measurable. Therefore, it is a relationship based on duties more than rights: we humans would be obliged to a natural world incapable of answering back. So liberal citizenship on the one hand, and ecological citizenship on the other, are rooted in different social ontologies – contractualism and reciprocity *versus* non-contractual obligations and non-reciprocal duties. When the duties and obligations at stake are not legally enforced as part of environmental policies, their assumption by citizens can only be *morally* founded. And the resulting moralisation of citizenship poses some problems as far as its institutionalisation, hence also deliberation, is concerned.

The main problem with this side of ecological citizenship is that it cannot be directly incorporated into deliberative institutions: the natural space for moral duties and obligations toward nature is outside the political system. Only that dimension of ecological citizenship having to do with the definition and implementation of sustainability, normatively conceived, can be included in deliberative procedures. Deliberative politics cannot even include responsibilities closely related to the practice of sustainability, that is, legal duties and obligations embodied in the law, whose existence is demanded by the fact that sustainability requires political participation *as well as* citizen cooperation. Leaving aside the doubts surrounding a conception of ecological citizenship based on duties and responsibilities, it is the very absence of social agreement on the green conception of the good that prevents such inclusion. Duties toward nature cannot be conceived as duties of citizenship *unless* an ecocentric conception of the good becomes socially accepted: they must, then, remain as individual moral choices. Their moral, pre-political nature is not enough for translating them into legal obligations. Therefore, the ethical dimension of ecological citizenship, whether related to cooperation for the implementation of environmental policies or to

MANUEL ARIAS-MALDONADO

moral duties toward nature, is *not* a reason for defending deliberative procedures – hence it is not the right link between green politics and deliberative democracy. Still, deliberative procedures can arguably serve as an *indirect* means to the end of the aforementioned moralisation of citizenship. If citizens defend the interests of the natural world or future generations, hence incorporating them into the political process, deliberation becomes an arena for those duties and responsibilities to be, at least, publicly expressed.

2.4. Deliberative democracy is the best way to combine expert judgement and citizen participation in decision-making processes

Sustainability and the very environmental problems it is committed to control offer two contrasting aspects, which need to be adequately weighed if a democratic articulation of them is to be found. On the one hand, sustainability is undeniably normative, for it cannot be ideologically or scientifically pre-determined, but must be defined according to value judgement. On the other hand, any definition of sustainability requires technical implementation through science and technology, which in fact also provide the background for the proper understanding of the relationship between society and nature. Therefore, a balance must be kept between democratisation of sustainability and the application of technical standards to decision making. Deliberative democracy is well suited for dealing with these critical features of sustainability, because it facilitates the politicisation of risk without neglecting its technical dimension. A political approach to environmental problems must recognise their essentially *normative* nature: their dependence on an external source of definition and control, which regards their technical side simply as another subject for assessment and decision.

It is important to underline, however, that the society–environment relationship is *internal* to society: it is not established between an inner society and an outer nature, but between the former and a nature already adapted and transformed as *human* environment. Hence institutional frames and everyday contexts are not merely *expressions* of the society-nature relationship which lies at the origin of the production of environmental problems, but contexts and processes *essential* to the constitution, representation and practice of that relationship (Irwin, 2001: 11). The kind of reflective judgement projected onto an environmental risk which defies any objective definition also leads to discursive processes; the very nature of the process of *unveiling* and *constructing* environmental risk mirrors that of deliberation. Ecological problems are then *revealed* in the very process of their construction (Adam and Van Loos, 2000: 2). To institutionalise that process in a deliberative context not only leads to recognition of the *political* character of environmental risk construction – but to its very *democratisation*. As long as nobody possesses an objective knowledge of sustainability nor can claim an ultimate truth about it, participation enriches the process of knowledge production – for the latter is created through communication itself. Deliberative democracy,

emphasising communicative rationality and deliberation that facilitates open and rational communication among participants, seems to be well suited for helping in the social definition and management of environmental sustainability.

2.5. *Deliberation and inclusion lead to more legitimate and efficient decisions on sustainability*

In spite of their fortuitous appearance, ecological risks are socially produced, not only in a general sense as the side-effects of the autonomous dynamics of modernity, but also as the upshot of various social practices and institutions. Democratisation of sustainability prevents citizens from seeing environmental problems and ecological risks as merely fortuitous, inclining them to adopt an attitude based on the premise that it is possible to control and to manage them (cf. De-Shalit, 2000: 169). It is to be noticed that the complexity and functional differentiation of society, which lies at the origin of the social production of ecological risks, increases the contingency of any social action: the greater the possibilities for action, the greater also the interdependence of the chosen courses of action (cf. Eder, 2000: 230). Social responsibility is then extended to every sphere; uncertainty is socially shared. In such contexts, the introduction of deliberative politics does increase the legitimacy of a decision that is bound to have effects on any social agent. A greater inclusion in the decision-making process, especially of those affected by a specific risk, diminishes the delegitimising effects of a decision that might finally happen to be mistaken. Although discourse can contribute to reducing risk, its primary function would be to redistribute responsibility, by binding members of society through relationships of reciprocal control (Eder, 2000: 242). The goal is to produce more legitimate decisions, rather than more efficient ones: legitimacy is, in this context, a function of co-responsibility.

However, the introduction of deliberative devices for the definition and management of sustainability can result not only in more legitimate, but also in more efficient and rational decisions. Deliberation on environmental sustainability can improve the resulting decision in several ways. The flexibility and plurality of participants permits them to make decisions that are able to be adapted and self-corrected in the light of new or supervening circumstances, information or arguments. This is something that is likely to occur when dealing with sustainability. And though it is also true that deliberation can increase conflict among participants, thereby obstructing decision making, deliberation is not meant to last forever: temporal limitations for reaching a decision and voting mechanisms would put an end to the process, although it is theoretically supposed to go on indefinitely. Finally, so long as the perception of a given ecological risk as acceptable depends, above all, on its distribution being perceived as fair by the affected people, democratisation of decision through deliberation makes it easier to balance such distribution, thanks to the open nature of deliberative

procedures (Mills and King, 2000: 142). Likewise, in a deliberative context it is easier to unmask the ideological covering of risk discourses. Therefore, increased rationality becomes the side-effect of increased legitimacy.

Fourth excursus: *deliberation and expert judgement.*
In spite of the possibilities opened up by deliberative institutions, the appropriate relationship between expertise, democratic decisions and participation is not easy to arrange. There are different problems having the same source: the deep divergence between technical and lay discourses. The legitimacy of any decision can be undermined in the absence of citizen judgement, but leaving expertise aside might in turn lead to inefficiency. And if citizens are to accept judgements made by scientists without being able to evaluate their foundations, is that compatible with individual autonomy and democratic polity? (cf. O'Neill, 1993: 5). The answer would be that the compatibility of autonomy and democracy regarding expert judgements whose foundations cannot be assessed by citizens, will be dependent on the mediating devices chosen to help participants to deliberate and decide – by bringing those technical foundations closer to their understanding.

However, for scientific issues to be opened to citizen participation, science itself would need to be perceived not as an objective exploration of reality, but as a subjective discourse on certain facts. This is at least the position usually supported by radical democrats and greens alike, who deprive expert judgement of its almost sacred condition, by pointing out its social and ideological substratum. Both citizen and expert judgement would be seen as dependent on value and normative judgements. The dichotomy between scientific knowledge and participative democracy is thus properly redefined: dialogue between citizenry, politicians and scientists on environmental risks is not so much an obstacle to decision making grounded on knowledge, as a means to achieve it (Lidskog, 2000: 218). Henceforth, democratic definition of sustainability and control of risks require greater citizen participation, according to greater political responsibilities. They are to become active participants in a public discourse on risk, given that only within that discourse can decisions on risk be taken (Hiskes, 1998: 147). Thus Eckersley:

> 'all those potentially affected by risks should have meaningful opportunity to participate or otherwise be represented in the making of the policies or decisions which generate such risks' (Eckersley, 2000: 118).

Those affected constitute a community of fate, grounded on the shared exposure to a given risk. Even though Eckersley is primarily referring to under-represented groups, such as future generations and the natural world, her inclusive principle expresses the way in which late modern risks exert their influence on the political process. In this sense, deliberative forms appear to be the most adequate ones to cope with them. The reason is simple: although both expert and citizen judgement contribute to the social construction of environmental risk, the

relationship between those two ways of knowledge may, in the absence of any proper interaction between them, remain useless. Deliberative democracy can avoid such divergence – especially as far as citizen understanding of scientific issues is concerned.

The main problem here is how the democratisation of science seems to entail the defence of a weak science. Some kind of participatory science would then be conceived 'as an instrument to dethrone science or to deprive scientific knowledge of its authority and legitimacy conferred by modern society' (Bäckstrand, 2004: 109). A new civic science is supposed to spring from these theoretical developments – though it is not clear what this science amounts to, nor how useful it may be. Yet democratisation of science does not mean that lay experiences will have the same weight in the decision-making process as expert judgement: the limits of politicisation are to be cautiously set. This is not to dismiss public participation and decision on scientific issues, but rather to be careful about its institutionalisation. Claims in favour of participatory science frequently express an exaggerated optimism over the will and the ability of citizens to understand complex subjects in differentiated societies where expert knowledge is not easily accessible for the majority. This gap is the heart of the matter: citizens will have to accept expert judgement in areas beyond their understanding. The public condition of science should mean greater accountability, as well as a more reflective decision-making process and more reflective implementation practices. Sustainability is in itself a process of social learning, whose implementation does require citizenship cooperation on a daily basis – hence better public understanding of science is surely necessary. But lay judgement *on* science does not automatically equal a new, more reliable science. Greater rationality provided by deliberative procedures vanishes without proper scientific assessments. Therefore, we need a model of deliberation able to balance the weight of every kind of knowledge. The institutional flexibility of deliberative democracy may certainly help to achieve such a delicate balance between lay citizenry and expertise, between different understandings of risk and the need for rational *and* legitimate decisions on it.

3. DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY AND NORMATIVE SUSTAINABILITY: TOWARDS A CONCLUSION

The case for deliberative democracy in green politics is strong enough to be seriously considered, as it amounts to the currently hegemonic approach to democracy within environmental thinking. Although the green reasons for adopting deliberative principles and procedures comes mainly from democratic theory itself, rather than being endogenously produced, they are neither scant nor weak. The sum of different theoretical efforts has ended up in the emergence of a green defence of deliberative democracy. Yet not too many expectations should be

MANUEL ARIAS-MALDONADO

placed on deliberative democracy as a vehicle for greening society, for there is not, nor can there be, any guarantee of its realisation. Deliberation should not be asked to do more than it can deliver.

The problem is that green support for deliberative democracy habitually takes the latter as a means to ecological ends: it is seen as a procedure whose political virtues eventually deliver environmental advantages. Are deliberative procedures then only accepted as long as they contribute to the achievement of green goals – so that any other democratic, even political model showing greater ecological effectiveness would be chosen instead? Although such an instrumental perspective is not usually explicit in green accounts, it underlies the otherwise diverse arguments supporting deliberative democracy – and it is consistent with the temptation towards consequentialism which has traditionally troubled the green relationship to democracy. Yet the language of suspicion is not entirely fair to greens regarding their defence of deliberative democracy: after all, environmentalism can only provide its commitment to democracy, not democracy's commitment to green values. Therefore, once the green commitment to democracy has been openly stated, looking for the most favourable model of democracy from a green point of view is the most obvious thing to do – and their choice is consistent with their traditional inclination to participative politics. Moreover, there are not many other options available within democratic theory to create the conditions for spreading green values within the institutional system. That is why stressing the absence of any guarantee of success is somewhat superfluous, given the uncertainty and contingency which characterise political processes. The politics of nature cannot escape the nature of politics.

However, firmer ground for the connection between environmentalism and deliberation may be found, and the principle of sustainability can provide it. This would not assure greener outcomes, but would make way for a more comprehensive defence of deliberative procedures in relation to environmental sustainability – a connection I have explored in detail elsewhere (cf. Arias-Maldonado, 2000). Sustainability, broadly understood as the balance between society and its natural environment, is the main goal for any green agenda. It is a principle whose normative status precludes any previous determination of its content through scientific or ideological patterns – for decisions regarding sustainability are ultimately decisions about values. Neither technocratic management nor ecological wisdom can claim a cognitive monopoly on sustainability. The constitution of green democracy explicitly adopts a normative principle of sustainability and submits it to democratic and public definition. The democratisation of sustainability turns out to be part of the movement towards the modernisation of green politics itself. It is the normative conception of sustainability which brings with it the necessary connection between green politics and democracy, the adoption of a deliberative model helping democratisation with *regard to* sustainability. Hence, discursive shaping of sustainability and its later public control take place in the course of deliberative procedures which,

properly limited by representative institutions, form the institutional frame of decision in a green democracy.

This is not to dismiss the green arguments explored above for adopting deliberative democracy. Rather, it is to link them to a central purpose, to which they contribute by performing different functions. It also works the other way around: as long as the politics of sustainability works, different benefits more closely related to environmental awareness and the protection of nature may well be provided. For it is to be remembered that sustainability does not necessarily mean more preservation of the remaining natural world, no matter how desirable it is privately considered. More specifically, the engagement of an active citizenship in the public definition of sustainability is likely to be essential to any democratisation of sustainability – so that if citizens decide not to participate, other solutions should be found. This stubborn hindrance to any prospect for deliberative democracy, be it green or not, drives us again to the problem of the intrinsic contingency of the relationship between sustainability and democracy. To put it bluntly: the normative condition of sustainability may find in deliberative politics the best way of institutionalisation – therefore the former *demands* the latter. But the opposite is not the case, Does deliberative democracy demand in itself a politics of sustainability? Not at all.

The former connection ultimately depends on social consensus on the goal of sustainability. There are no reasons to expect the right decision to emerge automatically from a deliberative procedure. And the very logic of democracy should prevent us from talking about *better* decisions – are there not only *legitimate* decisions in a participative democracy frame? The normative conception of democracy embraces that rationale, thus preventing any consequentialism. It is 'the paradox of democratic sustainability', as presented by Jacobs: as long as the role of sustainability depends on its position as a social value, and given that it is not generally conceived as a binding restriction on public decision-making procedures, the potential conflict between the procedural ethics of deliberative democracy and the ethical outcome of sustainability might be acknowledged (Jacobs, 1997: 228). To defend an explicitly normative conception of sustainability may facilitate its social acceptance; for the principle constitutes a general frame rather than a given set of specific restrictions and policies. Yet it does not guarantee it, and the same goes for a democratic process based on deliberation: the better procedure does not necessarily deliver the desired outcome. However, in case sustainability is accepted as a topic for deliberation, the latter provides the most adequate frame for debating between different variations of such a contested concept as sustainability. There is a necessary link connecting an open view of sustainability and deliberative politics.

But is sustainability to be accepted as such an issue for public deliberation? Hopeless as it might sound, greens can only wait until sustainability becomes a generalisable interest, thus opening itself to collective definition and democratic institutionalisation. We can expect that a commitment to sustainability will

emerge, or even wish for it – but nothing more. A further, final paradox arises here, however: one whose meaning is perhaps deeper than it seems. As we have seen, it is not only a matter of green values rising slowly in a society too easily distracted by different global topics: citizens might well refuse democratically to give priority to environmental concerns. The belief that citizens in a deliberative context will spontaneously acquire ecological enlightenment, and will push for greener decisions, relies too much on an optimistic, naive view of human nature, so frequently found in utopian political movements. It is, in fact, an unlikely scenario. For all the praise of deliberative democracy, it would probably be easier for *representative* institutions to set sustainability as a social goal. As a general principle whose complexity affects all social spheres, it is likely that resistance will be more easily avoidable through the action of accountable yet not directly democratic political bodies.

If we cannot wait until deliberation spreads green values, green policies can certainly be implemented by representatives. Representation is not any historical whim, but rather, the result of logic. Traditional dismissal of representation on the part of greens has been based upon a generous confidence in the moral advantages of direct political participation. However, representation can contribute more to the advance of the green agenda than it is given credit for, as well as serving deliberative principles better. It also has the advantage of avoiding, or at least softening, the exclusions engendered by the deliberative process – by equalising the general competence for deliberation and negotiation among representatives. Thus it is in principle not affected by the aforementioned 'epistemologic inequality' which can distort the entire process of debate among citizens. Henceforth, a combination of representation and deliberation would be more useful at the outset, fostering deliberation *within* representative institutions and enhancing greater representation of those social spheres which deserve a say on matters that affect them. Once the principle is introduced, democratisation *through* deliberation may be pursued. Only then is it possible for a somewhat speculative solution to become a more realistic one.

NOTE

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