

PHILO-DEMOCRACY: AN ALTERNATIVE RESPONSE TO THE CHALLENGE OF ENVIRONMENTAL GOVERNANCE

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Abstract

Bridging academic theory and practice is evidently of transcendental importance, now that societal demands include training responsive citizenry for nation-building. This remains to be a legitimate challenge in Philosophy and in significant other disciplines even until today. Thus, in order to increase the utility of environmental ethics in addressing pressing environmental governance issues, any attempt has to transcend its orientation towards a more assimilative stance. *Public Environmental Philosophy (PEP)* is one considerable alternative. Its focus is not just to increase ethical appreciation for sustainable biotic community, but to integrate unorthodox theorizing into policy making so that the end-result is a gradual shift of ethical focus and an expansion of social responsibility from mere input-dependent capability to output-driven actuality.

This paper offers an alternative practical method of looking into some challenges posed by environmental governance. The analytical frameworks used are pluralism, democracy, and public management. The strategies to

enhance more responsive governance include public environmental philosophy and eco-democracy. A three-pronged policy agenda is hereby suggested. It asserts the integration of ethics of 'practical efficacy' into the visioning capability and actuality of the organization, the cultivation of a 'policy turn' pragmatism and its assimilation into the organization's philosophy, and the mainstreaming of environmental philosophy of the organization through the democratization of its 'motivational turn'. Although this is just an alternative theorizing, but still it is a considerable one.

Keywords: philo-democracy, public environmental philosophy, eco-democracy, public management and development, pluralism

BREAKING THE GROUND FOR ALTERNATIVES

How do we collectively determine our shared goals towards a sustainable environment? Under what environmental system can we provide citizens with indivisible respect for autonomy so that a "fully flourishing human life" is achieved (Swift 2006)? When can we say there is "intellectual and moral development of citizens" amidst the paradox of consumption and conservation (Ibid.)? These are three essential governance-related questions that merit concrete answers. Theorizing must commence with the acceptance of academic theories being directly linked with practices. Through this, a gradual shift of ethical focus and an expansion of social responsibility from mere input-dependent capability to output-driven actuality are given philosophical depth and practicality.

Legitimate observations point out that there is an on-going struggle for mainstream Environmental Ethics to address its own almost all, if not all, colossal challenges in environmental governance. This is especially true when such discipline has not departed from its orthodox orientation that encourages theory building but is restrained on practical applications. As a response, this essay attempts to introduce alternative ways of looking into environmental governance, designed *of, for, by, and with* the affected members of

the biotic community. The objective is to introduce environmental philosophy as one that has graduated from the concept of ethics. It employs important frameworks such as pluralism, democracy, and public management into the discussions, and alternative models such as public environmental philosophy and eco-democracy are to be assimilated to enrich what could have been an interesting convergence in politics and philosophy.

First, it discusses the utility of environmental philosophy and how its orientation can be made public through the precepts of pluralism. Second, it exposes a number of pertinent literatures about democracy and its contributions to sustainable environment. And third, it synthesizes public environmental philosophy and eco-democracy to break the ground for an alternative theorizing in policy making and environmental governance. The foregoing concept is what I liberally termed as Philo-Democracy.

PUBLIC ENVIRONMENTAL PHILOSOPHY (PEP) AND ITS ONTOLOGICAL VALUE

There is more worth to environmental philosophy than merely addressing the issues of production, consumption, and conservation of the natural environment. Over the years of philosophizing, we must have come to realize what constitutes the identity of that object— it being pivotal in answering complex questions such as, but not limited to, how relationships are established between stability and intricacy of ecosystems, what roles scientific models perform in ecological population, why representations become necessary in treating uncertainties in the biologic predispositions amongst others. “None of these issues has anything to do with ethics ... and it is a mistake to think of the philosophical issues in question as merely environmental ethics” (Colyvan 2007).

To capture it in a more historical sense, W.J. Mills (1982) animates three metaphors that embody the changing conceptions of nature through the years, ranging from ‘book of nature’ of the *Middle Ages* to ‘man as the microcosm’ of the *Renaissance* up until ‘the world as machine’ of the contemporary period. These fluidly changing metaphors are accounted to underpin belief which in the long run underpins actions. As the process moves on, those actions motivate

us with what we can do with and to nature (Saward as cited in Dobson and Eckersley 2006). In other words, environmental philosophy requires flexibility both in theory and practice. It must be able to connect its pedagogical impact on environmental realities, but conscious enough to accentuate “robust division of labor” (Throop 2007). The fulfilment of which depends on the gradual shift of ethical focus and expansion of social responsibility from mere input-dependent capability to output-driven actuality. Input-dependent capability is that which is moulded by the strengths of environmental ethics. Output-driven actuality is that which is nourished and sustained by the vigor of public environmental philosophy.

Environmental philosophy need not be contained to its seemingly outdated approach. If environmental philosophers would want to champion for a more purposefully defining discipline, then they must be able to stir the trajectory of environmental philosophy towards relevant pragmatism. This may include the identification of normative nature of environmental problems and their solutions (Kassiola 2003) as well as pushing environmental ethics away from numerous debates in value theory (e.g. anthropocentrism vs. non-anthropocentrism, instrumental vs. intrinsic value, etc.) to the direction of a more pluralist and policy-oriented approach (Light 2007). Arguably, presentation of scientific empirical data embedded with philosophical interpretations could be one of the many viable strategies. Perhaps it is about time to harmonize the strengths of both pure and liberal sciences to be able to appraise comprehensively the knowledge of environmental conditions and link such to the application of ethics.

Truly, in the process of engaging more conscientious members of the society in the massive call for environmental sustainability, relevancy of the subject matter has almost always been the area of critical consideration. Relevancy does not only pertain to how environmental philosophy can kindle our sense of awareness towards nature. More than anything else, relevancy is about the challenge we pose upon philosophers and conservationists alike on how environmental philosophy can ignite apathy (both intrinsic and manifest) amongst non-philosophers and non-conservationist and

translate such apathy into concrete, realizable, and actionable sense of environmental righteousness. Simply put, public environmental philosophy must compliment policy actions. Thereupon, conceptualizations of policy actions and object-subject of commitments must be logically tied up with the supposed public orientation of that which provides the value of existence in the first place. One working contention is that environmental philosophy cannot achieve its purpose when it is delimited to mere production of ideas. A functional ontological value within environmental philosophy is sustained when “the ‘action’ of agents - including knowledge-based[sic] servers and knowledge-based systems - can be seen through a tell and ask functional interface, where a client interacts with an agent by making logical assertions (tell), and posing queries (ask)” (Levesque as cited in Gruber 1992).

Hence, discussions about the public character of environmental philosophy have proven to become even more relevant nowadays. They have to be encouraged and propagated if both structural and agential changes are to be anticipated. The idea of making pluralism as one identifiable framework to pursue public environmental philosophy does not only make an interesting argument, but also provide preliminary baseline for policy making. Pluralism in this regard is meant to include a democratic avenue for the proliferation of ideas without disregarding value-based synthesis amongst theses and anti-theses from differing polarities in the socio-political spectrum. Thus, environmental philosophy becomes public only when it anchors on the actuality of members believing to “have many visions of the good society,” even if some of these visions may include those of the past generations (Schumaker 2008).

Eventually, the perceived social order is founded upon the principle of harmonious interaction for the common ends among various distinct communities, each of which possesses both identity and openness (Westerhoff as quoted in Thompson 1998). Pluralism further posits the co-existence of multiple and diverse belief systems in a single culture (Avila and Furman 2000), reaffirms the democratic theory in a modern, urban, and industrial society, and enhances representativeness, inclusiveness, and to a greater extent, interest rationality.

A significant number of scholars contend that pluralism is a practical solution to the problem of achieving democratic ideas in a large and complex social system (Dye and Zeigler 1987). Advocates even put forward the idea that pluralism is the best system for a representative democracy because it protects citizens from too great a centralization of power and allows the diverse interests to be expressed (Sargent 1993). Although the danger of pluralism is its tendency to accommodate all different valid truths, it is precisely the public-ness of environmental philosophy and its conscious appreciation of eco-democracy that will help generate more synthesized responses to the critical issues on the environment.

ECO-DEMOCRACY AND ITS TRANSCENDENTAL IMPORTANCE

The classical liberal characteristics of democracy require a multiplicity of parties that represent competing policy agenda and clear political alternatives, limitations on governmental authority and guaranteed rights of free expression and association (Newman and Takashi 1997). Democracy then is a political system in which citizens enjoy a number of basic civil and political rights (Almond et al. 2004). It is a system of governance that represents both in form and content the interests of the broad populace (Parenti 2002) where individuals are free to express and act on their opinions and interests—the interests themselves proliferate because of political freedom (Magstadt 2003). Moreover, democracy is based on the practice of all peoples' respecting the rights of the majority (Ebenstein 2000) without necessarily overruling and suppressing minority rights.

The argument for citizen participation in public affairs depends not on its policy outcomes but on the belief that such involvement is essential to the full development of human capacities. In affirmation, traditional democratic theory has valued popular participation as an opportunity for individual self-development highlighting individual dignity as the underlying value of democracy (Dye and Zeigler 1987). True to John Dewey's words, democracy has a working faith in the possibilities of human nature and a concern for creating the conditions to realize human potentialities (Honer et. al. 2002). Baruch de Spinoza reaffirms by saying that democracy is where man's natural

sociability may thrive (Williams as quoted in Carver and Martin 2006). However, it is essential to complement John Dryzek's (2000) observation that the earlier versions of democratic theory and practice have anthropocentric dispositions at their core that may hamper and/or digress genuine understanding of the state of human affections and communications towards the environment.

A contested yet vibrantly pliant a concept as it is, democracy should therefore reinvent itself in order to cross beyond the borders of anthropocentrism if it intends to address compelling issues of the environment. This does not mean a complete departure from its pro-human objectives rather it means a rational inclusion to its core value of the idea of co-existence between what George Herbert Mead (1934) terms as 'individual organism' and 'physical-biological environment'. While others claim that decentralized democracy do not adhere to the precepts of environmentalism, Robert Goodin (1992) puts forward a challenging point for argumentation:

to advocate democracy is to advocate procedures, to advocate environmentalism is to advocate substantive outcomes: what guarantees can we have that the former procedures will yield the latter sorts of outcomes?

Terence Ball in his essay on *Democracy* (as cited in Dobson and Eckersley 2006) succinctly identifies the answer to the above-given question. The simple answer is none. His claim is that environmentalists have reasonable value-judgements to fear those outcomes that were at the very least democratically decided upon. At the same time, Ball believes firmly that there is a growing green alternative to assuage the fear and to usher the development of a recently identified concept of eco-democracy.

Eco-democracy does not exclude human interests and put them on top of the hierarchy of moral functioning. Instead, it values "human interests as one set within a web of complexly interdependent interests" (Ball as quoted in Dobson and Eckersley 2006). This means that democratic-political considerability is expanded to include members of a biotic community that are representative of today and the future. Thus, there must be an ecological challenge that should subject democracy into active-adaptive transformation thereby exposing an interest-based

democracy of and for the affected members (Ball as cited in Dobson and Eckersley 2006). I suggest that the “of and for” ontology be reassessed in light of the principle of transparency and accountability. In the grand scheme of things, the syntax should now go as “of, for, by and with” so that active ownership stance, more democratic representation, and vigilant deliverance are predicated on the roles and functions of the affected members of the biotic community.

Eco-democracy must therefore be strengthened as a concept that shall translate pragmatic philosophy and institutional action-plans into actual practice. Terence Ball highlights significant factors in fulfilling the roadmap to more responsive environmental governance. These are representativeness, inclusiveness, interest rationality, and environmental education. I argue that while the first two factors can be politically determined, the latter two should be construed as matters of essential human options. These options are capable of serving as epistemological supplements and sensible guidance to the “enlargement of thinking” (Eckersley 2000) of humans vis-à-vis the “not-yet-living and non-human others” (Ball as cited in Dobson and Eckersley 2006). While eco-democracy credits sustainability as one viable characteristic to its conditions for actual take-off, it does not restrain itself from the perspectives of the ‘now’ policy formulations and implementations. Rather, it is forward-looking, assimilative, and multi-disciplinary both in its theory building and practice.

PHILO-DEMOCRACY AND ITS FUTURE

Perhaps the most compelling environmental fervour of today would be to encourage one to ‘think globally and act locally’ in which decision-making, participation, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation take place at the grassroots level. This means translating “decentralized politics associated with the Green movement” into a more politically pragmatic orientation (Dobson 2006).

An organization can respond adequately to the challenges of environmental governance through a three-pronged policy agenda: 1.) by integrating the ethics of “practical efficacy” (Sandler 2002) into the visioning capability and actuality of the organization; 2.) by cultivating a “policy turn” (Frodeman 2006) pragmatism and

assimilating such into the organization's philosophy; and 3.) by mainstreaming the environmental philosophy of the organization through the democratization of its "motivational turn" (Booth 2009) –that which is geared towards outcome-based results, transcendental management, and functional public actions.

We can materialize the aforementioned three-pronged policy agenda when we are able to include the following values of 'Governance Culture' (Lakibul 2011) into the operations of our public environmental philosophy and eco-democracy.

- *Proactive Effectiveness*: by transcending well-designed public management systems away from their mere passive, "ad hoc", and exigency-oriented status so that policy making becomes a proactive undertaking; by crafting and institutionalizing an environmental subject to be part of an academic curriculum highlighting the strengths of philosophizing while equipping students with the necessary reasoning skills and practical strategies to address even the most technically determined issues of the environment.
- *Vigilant Participation and Responsible Equity*: by intensifying participatory management decisions and practices from empowered bottom where representation is multidirectional and democratically equitable; by engaging citizens to take part in vision setting and extending the same opportunity to the areas of implementation, monitoring, and even evaluation; by encouraging more environmental non-government organizations and/or groups to partake in public discourses about the philosophy and public management of the environment.
- *Adequacy and Responsiveness*: by making the management active-adaptive through agential reform and enabling participatory environment that is replete with well-discerned incentives, intensive public awareness, extensive education, and timely and purposefully motivated actions that are not only ethics-driven in all aspects.
- *Objective Appropriateness*: by operationalizing a management style that must change from one of control to one of instruction and guidance (Herrera 2001) and proactive deliverance, rather than of subjective pacesetting and cultural conformance; by

ensuring that any policy promulgated is understood to have been thoroughly subjected to close appreciation of the linkage of philosophy with practice.

- *Focused Timeliness and Efficiency*: by creating a bold effort for conscientious paradigm shift – making management of resources independent from the total control of legality, resistive to the complete dictates of development administration, and transcendently supportive to the values of good governance.

Simply phrased, to achieve more responsive environmental governance, policy makers and philosophers must work diligently together in the areas of instruction, method, and application. The objective of which is to allow citizens to “choose freely among justice-respecting lifestyles and values” (Schumaker 2008) so that their ethically autonomous selves are empowered. It is interesting that philo-democracy’s thrust is geared towards the achievement of that and even more. It is all the more interesting to be accommodating a brand of philosophizing that caters to humanistic profundity of life – that which is sensitive to practicality, cognizant of active-adaptive proactivity, and deliberate in its intentions to influence for the better. Introspectively, philo-democracy is one that enriches the senses, proliferates individual knowledge, accentuates communitarian reasoning, and actualizes the capability to yearn for more philosophical actions as a policy response to Bertrand Russell’s (1961) penultimate question of *Has Man a Future?*. We pay close attention to what the scholar has to say about a stable world:

I see, in my mind’s eye, a world of glory and joy, a world where minds expand, where hope remains undimmed, and what is noble is no longer condemned as treachery to this or that paltry aim. All this can happen if we will let it happen. It rests with our generation to decide between this vision and an end decreed by folly.

Indeed, the future of environmental governance can be directly or indirectly influenced by the kind of relationship established between public environmental philosophy and eco-democracy and the resulting alternative framework (Philo-Democracy) produced

therein. Although this is just an alternative, but still it is a considerable alternative. After all, physical, material, or existent things are in some way the products of the world of mind (Hegel as quoted in Edwards and Townshend 2002).

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