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22.1 Historical Background

Although widespread concern for ecology on the part of the public and the scientific community is a phenomenon of recent origin, a philosophic interest in man's place in nature is hardly a recent development. In broadest terms, the entire history of philosophy can be viewed as an attempt to work out the relationships between men and between man and nature.

Although philosophers have, from the time of the Greeks, developed and defended a plethora of theories with respect to the place of man in nature, Western civilization has been most strongly influenced by the Baconian conception of progress as constantly increasing control over nature. It is only quite recently in the West that the almost total hegemony of this philosophic outlook has been seriously questioned. The "blessings" of industrial, technological, and scientific advancement no longer seem to us an unqualified good. Certainly more people today than in nineteenth century England feel an uneasy twinge upon hearing J. S. Mill's comment:

Everybody professes to admire many great triumphs of Art over Nature: the junction by bridges of shores which Nature made separate, the draining of Nature's marshes, the excavation of her wells, the dragging to light of what she has buried at immense depths in the earth; the turning away of her thunderbolts by lightning rods, of her foundations by embankments, of her oceans by breakwaters.¹

We feel somewhat uneasy about these supposed triumphs, because we no longer accept with confidence Mill's underlying assumption that "all human action whatever consists in altering, and all useful action in improving, the spontaneous course of nature."²

In the twentieth century, with the increasing professionalization of philosophy, such broad philosophical issues as "the relationship between man and nature" have apparently lost their appeal for philosophers, at least in the English-speaking world. If one is to judge by the scarcity of philosophical literature on this topic, the subject has become a philosophical wilderness. Scientists and laymen have not been slow to step into the breach, but their enthusiasm for philosophical speculation is only rarely matched with an aptitude for the enterprise.

In general, problems related to environmental concerns have not fared very well. Almost nothing has been written, for example, about our obligations to future generations. Few attempts have been made to develop standards by which to assess people's choices, preferences, needs. Problems to do with the commensurability of values — how, for example, we should decide when we must choose between a million horsepower of electricity and a portion of the salmon run — have received surprisingly little attention.

However, one very important problem touching on the environment has received a good deal of attention from political philosophers, viz., the role of elites and masses with respect to political decision-making. I attempt in this chapter to clarify some of the issues involved in this problem and to show how they are relevant to the development and implementation of environmental policy.

22.2

The Aims of the Chapter

The management of water resources so as to preserve environmental "integrity" raises problems of a technical, scientific, and administrative sort. It is therefore appropriate that this book should contain essays on such matters as the environmental impact of drainage, irrigation, waste disposal, and pesticides. It would be a mistake, however, to equate environmental policy with environmental problem-solving. We could solve all our technical problems without fundamentally affecting the quality of our future environment.³ This is because the root issues of environmental policy are political and philosophical issues. The environment of a society reflects and expresses its values and its socioeconomic organization. A solution to the environmental problems facing Canadian society will require an examination of the dominant social values and a critique of our present political and economic institutions through which these values find expression.

The swiftness with which our major corporations have leaped aboard the anti-pollution bandwagon⁴ only partly disguises the fact that an attack upon environmental pollution is, inevitably, an attack upon the prevailing social system and dominant values. As even liberal economists have come to acknowledge, pollution is not an accidental feature of our social system but an integral part of it.⁵ This point is powerfully made by Paul Ylvisaker:

Call it by any name — chaos, unplanned growth, ribbon development, social anarchy, slurbs, the decline of American civilization, the resurgence of *laissez-faire*. But recognize it for what it is — a people's *laissez-faire*, which sinks its roots down past any rotting level of corrupt and cynical behavior by the few into the subsoil of widespread popular support and an abiding tradition of private property, individual freedom and "every-man's-home's-his-castle."⁶

What follows is an attempt to deal with certain aspects of the politics of environmental policy.

The phrase "politics of environmental policy" is a vague one, ranging over a number of important issues, only one of which will be explored at any length in this essay: the role of citizen participation in environmental decision-making. If my analysis is successful, it may, perhaps, provide a framework within which the substantive issues of environmental decision-making can more profitably be discussed.

In the course of developing an argument for radically increased citizen participation, I shall criticize and offer reasons for rejecting the theory most widely held by contemporary liberal theorists — the theory of "democratic elitism." Unavoidably, the discussion will extend into the disciplines of psychology and political sociology, for which trespass indulgence is asked from the professionals.

The conclusion towards which the argument of this chapter tends will be that no policy of environmental protection is likely to succeed without very substantial public involvement at all levels of decision-making.

22.3

Theories of Democratic Elitism

In the past decade, the idea of increasing citizen involvement in political decision-making has found favor not only with environmental activists, consumer groups, and students, but also with politicians of various persuasions.⁷ This recent upsurge in demand for more participation raises a central question for political philosophy: what is the place of participation in a modern viable theory of democracy?

Despite the fact that "participation" has become a popular rallying cry of citizens' groups, the theories of democracy which dominate the attention of most Western

political theorists assign to it an absolutely minimal role. Recent writers on democratic theory, especially in America, dismiss the ideal of significant public participation in decision-making as unattainable. More than this, they tend also to view it as undesirable or even dangerous.

Perhaps the most influential precursor of what I am going to call the theory of "democratic elitism"⁸ is Joseph Schumpeter, whose book *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*⁹ is taken as seminal by such contemporary liberal theorists as Henry Mayo,¹⁰ Robert Dahl,¹¹ Giovanni Sartori,¹² and Bernard Berelson.¹³ These political theorists would all agree, more or less, with Schumpeter's one-sentence summary of his concept of democracy: "Democracy means only that the people have the opportunity of accepting or refusing the men who are to rule them."¹⁴ Dahl notes that "the key political, economic, and social decisions" of Western liberal societies are made by "tiny minorities."¹⁵ The elite theorists attribute this phenomenon, in large part, to the nature of contemporary mass democracy, in which the great majority of people are politically unorganized, fragmented, and passive. The reality of our system is elite rule, and, according to Dahl, "It is difficult — nay, impossible — to see how it could be otherwise in large political systems."¹⁶

A basic assumption of elite theory is that "the masses" lack political competence. As Schumpeter somewhat baldly puts the point: "The electoral mass is incapable of action other than a stampede."¹⁷ This assumption lays claim to the virtue of hard-headed realism. During the last thirty years, there have been numerous empirical investigations by Western social scientists into the political behavior and attitudes of ordinary citizens. These studies have revealed, not surprisingly, that most citizens (and especially those in the "lower socio-economic status groups") exhibit a general lack of interest in and knowledge about politics and political activity.¹⁸ Moreover, "ordinary people" (people outside the various elite groups) are found to prefer consumption to conservation and to have authoritarian attitudes. In his widely read study of mass political behavior, *Voting*,¹⁹ Berelson concludes that the limited participation and apathy shown by the majority of citizens has a positive function for the system as a whole: it softens the edges of disagreement and facilitates adjustment and change.

In this contemporary liberal view of democracy, the political process is seen as analogous to the operation of the economic market. Voters are like consumers. They choose between the policy packages offered by the competing political entrepreneurs. The value of democracy, then, is purely instrumental; it is a political method the value of which is determined by the soundness of the decisions reached in the light of the needs of the community. The distinctive feature of democratic systems is the competition among elites for the people's vote. According to Schumpeter's theory, for example, the only means of participation which should be open to citizens is voting, periodically, for leaders.

This purely instrumental view of democracy can be traced back to the writing of Hobbes and Locke.²⁰ For example, the liberal animus against citizen participation is reflected in Hobbes' sarcastic reflection on the result of political activity:

... to have our wisdom undervalued before our own eyes; by an uncertain trial of little vain-glory to undergo most certain enmities ... to hate and be hated ... to lay open our secret councils and advices to all ... to neglect the affairs of our own families.²¹

Locke shares this view of politics as the activity of the few. Ordinary men, he writes, will go about their daily tasks without seeking any political life. Only when subject to a "long train of abuses" will they intervene in political life (and then by way of revolution!).

Thus, one strand — and perhaps the dominant strand — of liberal political philosophy, from Locke through Schumpeter to Dahl, expects active participation in the political process only from those who are dissatisfied with the benefits they are receiving. The “burdens” of self-government can be borne only by the few.

Contemporary liberal theorists have been much concerned with the development of a theory of democracy adequate to account for the realities of political behavior and attitudes. Those who espouse one or other version of “democratic elitism” usually want to insist that the theory is an empirical or descriptive one, above ideology; however, they are pleased to note that the amount of citizen involvement in Western liberal democracies, though minimal, is just about the *right* amount for a stable and effective system of democracy.²² Any significant increase in citizen participation, it is argued, would bring with it the likelihood of disturbing the consensus on norms which characterizes the various elite groups (despite their competition), thereby endangering that necessary stability on which liberal democracy is founded.²³

22.4 **A Critical Analysis of Democratic Elitism**

Having set out, albeit in a somewhat cursory fashion, a sketch of the theory of democratic elitism, I shall now subject the theory and its various presuppositions to critical scrutiny.

There is at least one key normative assumption implicitly underlying this supposedly “value-free” model of democratic citizenship. Those who defend the theory of democratic elitism and the severely limited political role which it accords to the majority of citizens typically adopt a “one-dimensional” input-output view of personal well-being:

... the democratic elite theorist ... posits that the value of the democratic system for ordinary individuals should be measured by the degree to which the “outputs” of the system, in the form of security, services, and material support, benefit them. On the basis of this reasoning, the less the individual has to participate in politics on the “input” and demand side of the system in order to gain his interest on the output side, the better off he is.²⁴

This normative assumption is shared both by such nineteenth-century liberals as James Mill and Jeremy Bentham and by contemporary liberals such as Schumpeter and Dahl. For both James Mill and Bentham the primary, if not the sole, function of citizen participation was protective: it ensures good government, conceived of as protection for the private interests of each citizen. Because they share this orientation, contemporary liberals tend to judge the success of a democratic system by the degree to which the system conforms to the basic principles of the democratic method: universal suffrage, freedom of discussion, elections at regular intervals, and the like. Whether the system offers most people sufficient opportunity to participate in meaningful decision-making is a question turned aside as irrelevant.

The contemporary liberal view of democratic citizenship, then, assigns to the “ordinary citizen” the role of passive recipient of benefits. Its one-dimensional view of man’s political interest serves to justify the division of “political labor” which exists in Western democracies: elites rule and non-elites participate only to that minimal extent necessary to ensure that they receive their proper benefits.

22.5 **Historical Antecedents of the Theory of Participatory Democracy**

Against this view, I should like to counterpose a “two-dimensional” view of democratic citizenship, wherein democracy is valued as a process as well as for the products it delivers. The public interest is measured not only by the correctness of the decisions

reached (the product), but also by the extent of public participation in reaching them (the process). Participation in political life, so far from being a burden, is held to be essential to the full development of individual capacities.

Historical antecedents of this theory can be found in the writings of Rousseau, early nineteenth century socialists, Marx and Bakunin, as well as being a prominent tendency within classical liberalism, as exemplified by John Stuart Mill.

William Morris comments, in *News from Nowhere*, that "individual men cannot shuffle off the business of life on to the shoulders of an abstraction called The State, but must deal with it in conscious association with each other."²⁵ In a similar vein, Marx writes that "only in association with others has each individual the means of cultivating his talents in all directions. Only in a community, therefore, is personal freedom possible."²⁶ John Stuart Mill adopts a similar ideology of self-development and agrees with the contention of Morris and Marx that the privatized individual engaged in competitive self-seeking and lacking any sense of community will be spiritually impoverished. The man who does not participate in public affairs and who "never thinks of any collective interest, of any object to be pursued jointly with others, but only in competition with them, and in some measure at their expense,"²⁷ will not only lack the virtue of public-spiritedness but will fail to develop many of his capacities.

Before I conclude this brief sketch of some of the historical antecedents of the theory of participatory democracy, it may be useful to point out one important implication of the argument as it has been developed to this point.

If participation of a significant kind in political decision-making does foster, as Mill and Marx believe, an active, public-spirited character, it may be that the answer to the famous dilemma presented by Garret Hardin in "The Tragedy of the Commons" is to be found in a system of participatory democracy. Hardin summarizes the dilemma as follows:

Each man is locked into a system that compels him to increase his herd without limit – in a world that is limited. Ruin is the destination toward which all men rush, each pursuing his own best interest in a society that believes in the freedom of the commons. Freedom in a commons brings ruin to all.²⁸

The only solution to this dilemma which Hardin can see is to legislate temperance: "mutual coercion mutually agreed upon." What Hardin fails to see is that the basic elements which combine to produce the tragedy are not immutable. In a capitalist quasi-market economy, relationships among both individuals and institutions are a matter of conflict or, at best, compromise. The individual's self-interest is necessarily defined in such a way that it is discrete from and in competition with the self-interest of others. There exists the possibility, however, that in an alternative socioeconomic organization, one compatible with a participatory society,²⁹ individual goals and interests would be enlarged and more fully realized by integration with wider social purposes. As we have seen above, theorists of participatory democracy argue that man has more opportunities for self-fulfillment when his own well-being is closely tied to that of his fellows. Having internalized and universalized the market ideology, Hardin becomes locked into a dismal vision of the position of man in society, a vision which is contradicted by our experience of, and need for, friendship and community.

Perhaps nowhere more than in the writings of Rousseau is the value of private life made subordinate to the value of community life. Rousseau's republic is so organized that egotism withers and gives way to a concern for the common good. Through participation in political activity ("political activity" here being very broadly defined) an ethos of public-spiritedness comes to infuse social life:

The better the constitution of a state is, the more do public affairs encroach on private in the minds of the citizens. Private affairs are even of much less importance, because the aggregate of the common happiness furnishes a greater proportion of that of each individual so that there is less for him to seek in particular cases.³⁰

A variant on this theme will be familiar to contemporary readers of A. H. Maslow and the "self-actualization" school of psychology. In his pioneering study of self-actualizing people, *Motivation and Personality*, Maslow concludes that such people invariably possess a commitment which extends beyond the realm of their own self-interest. Their frame of reference transcends privatism and a preoccupation with mundane matters:

These individuals customarily have some mission in life, some task to fulfil, some problem outside themselves which enlists much of their energies. . . . In general, these tasks are nonpersonal or unselfish, concerned rather with the good of mankind in general. . . . They work within a framework of values that are broad and not petty, universal and not local.³¹

The central thrust of the elitists' argument, the gravamen of their case against a participatory theory of democracy, is that it has little relevance to the reality of political life in large-scale industrial societies. In "the new industrial state," key political decisions must of necessity be made by tiny elites. The nineteenth-century ideal of "rational, active, informed democratic man" on which the participatory theory is founded is alleged to fly in the face of the available empirical data. As Berelson and others have shown, most people simply lack motivation, interest, and knowledge concerning politics and political issues.

The theorists of democratic elitism infer from such data that it is a very good thing, indeed positively functional to the democratic system as a whole, that most people participate minimally or not at all. Berelson himself comments that, from a social point of view, "individual 'inadequacy' provides a positive service for the system."³² Thus, the empirical and normative aspects of the theory supplement each other.³³

22.6

In Defense of Participatory Democracy

Theorists of participation reach a very different conclusion from the same data. They conclude that a system which produces such results is not working properly. Mass incompetence and indifference can be seen as the *product* of an elitist society rather than as the cause. If political power is the effective monopoly of elites, how can the majority develop political competence, and why should they take an interest in political affairs?

The key to this dispute seems to be located in the move by democratic elitists from the empirical to the normative aspect of their theory — that is, their move from the premise that most people are politically incompetent and uninterested to the conclusion that democratic elitism is therefore the best possible form of social organization. In assessing this inferential leap, we must consider whether it is legitimate to treat individuals, their aptitudes and attitudes, in isolation from the organization of society. Critics of democratic elitism reply that the elitists illegitimately isolate the political life of individuals from its socioeconomic context.

Advocates of participatory democracy argue that the general character of a citizenry is, in large measure, a function of the socioeconomic institutions of the society. Political behavior and attitudes are not independent of pre-existing social relations. Our attitudes to political authority, for example, are decisively influenced by the authority patterns which prevail in nongovernmental social settings, such as the family,

the school, and the workplace, for it is within these institutions that we normally spend most of our lives. Surprisingly, despite a good deal of recent empirical research (not to mention the widely read works of Rousseau, J. S. Mill, and Marx), contemporary liberal theorists seem not to take account of the manner in which social and political institutions profoundly affect the structure of the human personality.

But, to cite one recent study, Almond and Verba, in their book *Civic Culture*, discovered a positive correlation in every country they studied between political participation and the sense of political efficacy:

If in most social situations the individual finds himself subservient to some authority figure, it is likely that he will expect such an authority relationship in the political sphere. On the other hand, if outside the political sphere he has opportunities to participate in a wide range of social decisions, he will probably expect to be able to participate in political decisions as well.³⁴

Nor is it merely the *feeling* of political competence which forms and develops within participatory institutions; for, as the findings of Almond and Verba also show:

Participation in non-political decision-making may give one the *skills* needed to engage in political participation.³⁵

Given the hierarchical and authoritarian structure of educational and economic institutions in Western democratic societies, it seems at least as plausible to attribute the political attitudes and behavior of the majority of citizens to their "socialization" as to suppose them inherently apolitical and incompetent. What empirical evidence we have is certainly compatible with, if not positively supportive of, the contention of Rousseau and J. S. Mill that participation promotes the very attitudes and abilities necessary for further participation.

22.6.1

"Political" Defined

The case for participatory democracy rests heavily on the assumption that political participation has an educative function. To assess this claim we shall have to consider more closely than hitherto the denotation of the term "political" and examine carefully just what is meant by the term "participation."

Exponents of both the participatory theory of democracy and democratic elitism invite us to focus our attention on "political decision-making." But they have conflicting conceptions of the boundaries of the political realm.

Consider again the claim made by Schumpeter, Dahl, and others that in a modern industrial society the key political decisions must of necessity be made by a small minority. When we assess the plausibility of this claim, much will hinge upon how widely or narrowly we construe the phrase "political decisions." What decisions are to count as "political"?³⁶

It seems clear that in mass industrial societies certain "key governmental decisions" must ultimately be made by a relatively small number of individuals (though there may be some dispute as to which matters fall within this category). With respect to such decisions the elitist contention that public participation in political decision-making is unrealistic has considerable plausibility.

If, however, one operates with a wider interpretation of "political decision-making" the elitist case becomes much less plausible. Not all governmental decisions are of such a kind as to preclude public involvement. More importantly, not all "political" decisions are decisions of governments.

A. A. Berle remarks in *The Twentieth Century Capitalist Revolution* that the corporation has "invaded the political sphere and has become in fact, if not in theory, a

quasi-governmental agency."³⁷ A strong case can be made for enlarging our conception of the "political sphere" to include such nongovernmental institutions as large corporations. Bachrach, for example, suggests that large corporations be considered part of the "political" system "on the ground that they are organs which regularly share in authoritatively allocating values for society."³⁸ He is presumably thinking of the vast power possessed by modern corporations with respect to such important questions as resource allocation, plant location, production levels, and employment policy. Corporate influence on consumer preferences even extends to the choice of life styles. Given the fact that giant corporations exert a power in our society which rivals or exceeds that of governments, it seems reasonable to interpret the boundaries of the political system so as to include corporate decision-making. Society would then be seen as containing within itself several political systems.

The authority structure within each of these systems has an important effect — and none more important than the authority structure of industry — on the psychological dispositions and practical training of the individuals who live and work within them. J. S. Mill develops this point in some detail. He observes that democratic institutions at the level of the central government which are not supplemented by democratic institutions at the local level and by the other major institutions of the society cannot be more than a form without substance:

A political act to be done only once in a few years, and for which nothing in the daily habits of the citizen has prepared him, leaves his intellect and his moral dispositions very much as it found them.³⁹

The educative effect which theorists of participatory democracy claim for participation in political decision-making requires the overall context of a participatory society. That is, there must be substantial participation by individuals at the local level, in education, in industry or the workplace, and in local government, so that participation will be a significant part of the individual's everyday life.⁴⁰

The democratization of industry and other nongovernmental institutions of society is a topic of such far-reaching implications that it is scarcely possible in this chapter even to begin to explore its ramifications. If one accepts the contention that our major economic institutions exert political power and should be democratized, the further implications of this line of reasoning promise to be very radical indeed. For example, the measures necessary to transform an hierarchical and authoritarian industrial structure into one compatible with industrial democracy would certainly involve, as Murray Bookchin argues in *Post-scarcity Anarchism*, the development and implementation of a "liberatory technology."⁴¹

22.6.2

"Participation" Defined

It was suggested earlier that the denotation of the term "political" would need to be clarified in order properly to assess the conflicting claims of elite and participatory theorists. This has now been done. But the concept of "participation" itself stands in need of considerable clarification.

Participation is always participation by someone (or some group) in something. Disputes concerning citizen participation in environmental decision-making may focus on *who* should be (has a right to be) participating or in *what* they should be participating. I shall first examine the latter question, the forms of participation, and then go on to consider the former. It will be useful for the purposes of this discussion to distinguish a number of more or less distinct steps involved in making a political decision, let us say, with respect to some environmental matter: (a) a problem is perceived and defined; (b) the possible or likely alternatives available by way of solution to the problem are canvassed; (c) a proposal is advanced to adopt one or other measure; (d) a policy

decision is made; (e) a plan is formulated for the implementation of the decision; and, finally, (f) the decision arrived at is implemented. At each of these stages we can ask who should be participating, and how?

"Participation" sometimes refers simply to "influence." When citizens influence those who possess decision-making power, a little or a lot, the citizens may be said to have participated in the decision. The influence which a subordinate has over matters falling within his superior's jurisdiction is, in general, a weak form of control.

If we were to construct a participation continuum, the weakest form of participation would be questioning those with decision-making power about their decision after the decision has been made. One feels inclined to call the opportunity to ask questions *post facto* an example of "pseudo-participation."⁴² When "participation" is divorced from any real power or control over the outcome, what we have is not so much participation as a technique of social integration. Such techniques have become popular among "progressive" administrators and are found to be effective in some circumstances in producing acquiescence from those subject to their power.⁴³ One suspects that "public involvement" is often a euphemism for public propagandizing, occurring as it often does after decisions have, for all practical purposes, been made.⁴⁴ (This is not to say that making provision to encourage feedback from the public with respect to decisions made is of no value — just that it is the weakest imaginable kind of participation.)

There are several other forms which citizen participation can take. One easily overlooked form of citizen participation involves "ordinary" people defining problem areas as they perceive them. Were people to become involved with problems not because they have been defined as such by "the authorities," but rather because they are genuinely experienced as problems, citizen control would be markedly augmented. Bachrach and Baratz observe that one may fail to observe the nondemocratic elements of the governing process if one concentrates exclusively on *decisions* said to be significant.⁴⁵ To learn how power is distributed within a community, one has to inquire whether elite power is also manifested in what is *not* decided: the dynamics of nondecision-making. The nondecision-making process is that process whereby those with power use their power to prevent issues potentially harmful to their interest from becoming overt. For example, the public never decided that it preferred to live in communities organized so that the great majority must commute two hours a day to and from work and home. Many questions of this sort are never the object of anyone's decision. They do not arise as problems, though we know that they are frequently a source of great frustrations to those involved.

For the democratic elitist, citizen participation will take the form of choosing periodically (usually by voting in an election) which elites are to rule for the next period of time, though for a few individuals it will also involve seeking positions in one or other of the elites. For the participatory theorist, the forms of citizen participation advocated include defining problems and proposing, discussing, planning, making, and implementing the decisions which affect their lives. "Participation" is taken in its fullest sense. It is participation in *all* aspects of decision-making. This immediately raises the question of what conditions must be met for these ambitious forms of participation to be possible for ordinary citizens.

Implementing Participatory Democracy

If "full participation" as described above is to be a realistic possibility for most people, a number of necessary conditions must be met. Several come immediately to mind. First, and most obviously, if the public is to be involved in a major way in environ-

mental decision-making, it must have access to a great deal of information, and it must acquire the ability to assimilate and evaluate this information. Given the complexity and technical nature of many environmental problems, for example those to do with hydroelectric power projects, is it realistic to suppose that this condition can be met?

Richard Bocking suggests that the seriousness of this problem is easily exaggerated. Although decision-making in the water resources field is often made to appear a technical matter which must remain the private preserve of the experts,

... it is technical only to the extent that engineers, economists, biologists and other professionals are required in order to have clearly set forth the alternatives that are available to society, and all the consequences so far as they can be determined for each course of action.⁴⁶

Environmental decisions, like nearly all social decisions, will typically involve technical knowledge. But they invariably also involve a value component. As Bocking argues, the role of the expert should be to present the consequences of various lines of action as clearly and nontechnically as possible, while leaving the final decision to the community. For the final decision should reflect the value judgments of the community. As suggested in the introduction to this chapter, one cannot, using purely technical criteria, determine the correctness of competing solutions to problems of environmental decision-making. Social customs, norms, and values must be interpreted and applied in each case. Consider, for example, the question of whether to build a series of expressways through Winnipeg. This question will involve technical information about cost, terrain, traffic flows, population developments, and so forth. But the decision also involves a series of normative issues, such as whether the good of the community will really be promoted by encouraging ever more people to buy and use ever more cars. And if it should be decided that a series of expressways should be built, further value decisions will then have to be made concerning what kind of property to sacrifice, whether the wealthy or the poor should be burdened with an expressway through their neighborhood, and so on.

There are no compelling reasons for leaving such decisions to "the experts." Indeed, with respect to such questions, it is not obvious who the experts would be. The dynamics of group decision-making provide an opportunity to take into account the multiple perspectives of those involved. Equally important, as was argued earlier in the chapter, participation is a vehicle for the development of a sense of community interest and an attitude of public-spiritedness, both of which should help to ensure that a suitable decision is made.

A second condition necessary for full participation to be a realistic possibility is the decentralization of decision-making structures. For citizen participation to be meaningful, for it to produce the educative effects claimed by advocates of participatory democracy, it must be an ongoing process, not an occasional expression of opinion. It is difficult to escape the conclusion that meaningful participation is unlikely to occur when the decision-making structure is centralized. Centralization in an advanced industrial society almost inevitably requires large, hierarchically organized bureaucracies. And bureaucratic organizational structures typically produce in most citizens a sense of alienation and futility.

The concept of "decentralization" as applied to political decision-making can refer to any of several different processes: it can refer to the delegation of authority from higher to lower levels *within* an organization (whether governmental or corporate); it can refer to the delegation of authority to groups *outside* the organization, for example, when governments allocate control of certain projects to local nongovernmental groups; or it can refer to providing citizens with access to the institutions of

government and industry by any of several means, for example, permitting citizens or citizen groups to become involved in government or corporate decision-making.

It would be generally conceded, I think, that the development of large-scale bureaucratic organizational structures progressively restricts the access points of individual citizens to the decision-making process. The more centralized the political institutions, the more narrow and distorted becomes the view which citizens have of the process as a whole.

Given that various kinds of decentralization constitute an important requirement for a theory of citizen participation, we must now consider whether political and economic decentralization are feasible and/or desirable in an advanced industrial society. Space does not permit me to do more than allude to a few of the many problems which this question raises. I shall situate my examples again within a context of environmental decision-making.

It can be argued, with respect to such issues as water- and air-pollution standards, that uniform standards are necessary in order to promote national policy objectives. One danger associated with administrative decentralization or other forms of community control is that broad national policy objectives will be frustrated at the local level by idiosyncratic decisions.

In this connection, consider the many levels of society that are involved in large-scale water development programs. The revived plans for damming the Fraser River are opposed strongly by federal and municipal governments, but were favored by the Social Credit government of British Columbia and by the little town nearest the dam-site, which looks forward to the prospect of an economic boom during the construction of the dam.⁴⁷

A second example of the sort of difficulties which may arise from local control concerns English clean air legislation. It is notorious that many local English mining communities have bitterly resisted national clean air legislation. Fears for job security, in such cases, may outweigh other considerations. Of course, air and water move from one place to another, with the consequence that parochial policies adopted by one community may vitiate the more enlightened policies of nearby areas.

There is a third kind of problem facing advocates of decentralized decision-making. Environmental projects often have a cumulative effect. For example, it has been suggested that:

... the James Bay project in Quebec might have an effect upon the climate of parts of Ontario and Quebec. Add to the James Bay project the possible effects of diversion projects being studied in Northern Ontario, and the change in the water regime of the Nelson, and the almost total elimination of the Churchill in Manitoba. What total changes can be expected in the salinity of Hudson Bay, what additional biological ramifications might be expected that would affect not only weather patterns, but the polar bears, beluga whales, migratory wildfowl and many other forms of life whose existence is quite possibly conditional upon the maintenance of present water regimes.⁴⁸

This frightening scenario sketched by Richard Bocking suggests that it is of great importance that Canadian water development be considered as a whole. How can the enormously wide ramifications of large-scale environmental projects be accounted for under a system of decentralized decision-making?

None of these objections is, perhaps, decisive. The last point, for example, raises a problem which exists in an acute form under our present centralized system of decision-making. Is there any reason to believe that the problem of ensuring proper

recognition for the cumulative effects of environmental decision-making is soluble within a centralized system but insoluble within a decentralized one?

In any event, a theory of democratic citizenship which takes participatory democracy as its keystone will have to explore carefully and in great detail the feasibility of the various kinds of decentralization.

These problems associated with decentralized environmental decision-making lead us directly into the closely related question of *who* should be participating in what sorts of decisions.

The general principle often favored by theorists of participation is this: constituencies significantly affected by decisions are the ones that should make them. The principle seems reasonably straightforward. Problems arise, however, when we try to make precise the phrase "significantly affected." In a highly complex interlocking economy such as our own, almost any environmental decision is likely to have fairly widespread consequences. For example, when a new jetport is being planned for the Toronto area, the local residents of the area in which the jetport is to be located are obviously "significantly affected." But the entire community of Toronto has a substantial interest in the question, as, to a lesser extent, do potential users of the facility. Nor should we overlook the importance of such decisions for a national transportation policy. Many water development programs raise difficulties of just this sort.

With whom, then, should decision-making power lie?

The difficulties become more acute when the project entails action which will irreversibly harm rare natural phenomena.⁴⁹ Let us suppose, as is not infrequently the case with water development projects, that the area to be affected contains some unique natural phenomenon: an extraordinary geomorphologic feature, let us say, or a threatened species. Many people derive pleasure from the mere knowledge that a species has been saved or that part of the northern wilderness remains undespoiled, even though they are never likely themselves to experience glories of the wilderness or encounter some member of the species. When the existence of an ecosystem or an unspoiled wilderness is involved, the number of people who might justifiably claim to be "interested" (both in the sense of taking an interest and in the sense of having a stake in the outcome) may be very large.

A further point to note in this connection is that "interest" (in both above-mentioned senses) in environmental protection is in part a function of opportunity to participate in and enjoy different aspects of the environment:

When facilities are not readily available, skills will not be developed and, consequently, there may be little desire to participate in these activities. If facilities are made available, opportunities to acquire skill increase, and user demand tends to rise rapidly over time as individuals learn to enjoy these activities. Thus, *participation* in and enjoyment of water recreational activities by the present generation will stimulate future demand without diminishing the supply presently available.⁵⁰

The authors of this passage have adopted a "learning by doing" account of the formation of "interest" and, hence, of demand.

Perhaps an "activist epistemology" of this sort, reminiscent of Dewey,⁵¹ may provide us with part of the answer to the problem under consideration. Individuals become aware of their "interests" by a dialectical process: they learn what their interests are by acting in the world, and by acting in the world they strengthen their interests and develop new ones, which leads to further action, and so on. Analogously, it is by attempting to influence his political environment that the citizen discovers and develops his interest in the wider community and learns how to translate his objectives into political demands. All of this leads to the conclusion that it may not be necessary,

or even useful, in a participatory society, to centralize environmental decision-making in order to guarantee the wide overview which seems important.

Nevertheless, when a decision under consideration is likely to have widespread effects, many will feel that the "constituency of significantly affected persons" in whom decision-making power is vested, should include *representatives* of wider (though less intense) interests than those most immediately and directly affected. That is, we shall have to develop political decision-making structures which incorporate elements of both participatory and representative democracy.

22.8

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have attempted to show that extensive citizen participation — in political decision-making generally and environmental decision-making in particular — is both desirable and feasible. There are, however, problems facing a theory of participatory democracy which could not adequately be answered within the scope of this paper.

It is to be hoped that further work in the area will show that none of the problems is insoluble. In any event, it is of considerable importance that we recognize that no policy of environmental protection can succeed if it ignores "the politics of environmental decision-making."

22.9

Future Research

The preceding discussion of the politics of environmental decision-making raised, directly and indirectly, a number of problems requiring further research. Some of these problems are of a philosophical kind, while others would more properly fall within the purview of the psychologist, sociologist, or economist. In this section I identify some projects for further research.

1. It was argued above that a participatory theory of environmental decision-making cannot succeed without a very considerable decentralization of decision-making structures. The political philosophy of decentralization is an area which is just now beginning to receive the attention it deserves from political theorists. Empirical results from Yugoslavia and elsewhere concerning experiments in industrial democracy might be of great value in the development of a theory of decentralization suitable to an advanced industrial economy. Particular attention needs to be paid to the feasibility and desirability of decentralization when the issues involved have significant and widespread environmental impact. Economists, sociologists, and psychologists, as well as political theorists, obviously have a stake in this problem area.

2. We want to maximize individual well-being and to promote the public good. But how shall we determine and measure the utilities of such seemingly incommensurable goods as hydroelectric power, unspoiled wilderness, preservation of an endangered species, provision of employment to native peoples in poverty regions? Is there any non-arbitrary manner of assigning weights (or values) to such goods in order to measure them on a single scale for purposes of reaching an optimal decision?

A careful analysis of this question should be of assistance when a choice must be made with respect to the allocation of scarce resources between such mutually incompatible uses as economic growth and environmental conservation. Simply relying on the value judgments of the community provides only a partially satisfactory method of resolving the allocative conflict.

3. A further problem complicating any attempted resolution of the "allocative con-

flict" concerns the rights, if any, of "future persons." Do we have obligations to generations as yet unborn?

The maintenance of ecological balance is a matter affecting not only the immediate future but the future and quality of life of generations unborn. To what extent, and how, are we obligated to take such considerations into account when we are dealing with the allocative conflict?

This problem becomes especially pressing when it is recognized that the process of converting natural environments to industrial use is often an irreversible one. The supply of fabricated goods and commercial services may be capable of continuous expansion from a given resource base by reason of scientific discovery and mastery of technique, but the supply of natural phenomena is virtually inelastic. That is, if we do not preserve our natural environment now, it may not be possible to reproduce in future the amenities associated with an unspoiled environment.⁵²

4. An ecological balance exists in the moral as well as in the natural realm. Our moral ecology may be as much in danger at present as the natural one. The concept of "moral ecology" refers to the complex interrelationships among moral norms and social institutions which interact to produce social values.⁵³

Increasing affluence has a tendency to generate wants and "needs" at a faster rate than the means to fulfill them. If we conceive of new needs as fast as we invent means to satisfy our present needs, can we ever escape from the domination of needs? Those who see it as important to replace the "growth ethos" with an ethos of conservation will obviously have to come to grips with the perception and definition of needs. Despite its moral and prudential importance, the concept of needs has, to date, attracted few attempts at analysis.⁵⁴ Since economic need is among the most widely accepted rationalizations for human behavior, often employed to justify otherwise indefensible interferences with the environment, the subject is of more than casual interest.

Notes

1. J. S. Mill, "Nature," in *Readings in Philosophy*, ed. J. H. Randall, Jr., Justus Buchler, Evelyn Urban Shirk (New York: Barnes and Noble, Inc., 1950), p. 57; cited by Thomas Colwell, "The Balance of Nature," in *Human Values and Natural Science*, ed. Ervin Laszlo and James Wilbur (New York: Gordon and Breach Science Publishers, 1970).

2. *Ibid.*, p. 69.

3. Garret Hardin defines a "technical solution" as "one that requires a change only in the technique of the natural sciences, demanding little or nothing in the way of change in human values or ideas of morality," in "The Tragedy of the Commons," *Science* 162: 72. It can be argued, however, that the process of solving technical problems generates environmental, social, and political adaptations as well.

4. Significantly, the biggest polluters were the first aboard.

5. See, for example, John Kenneth Galbraith, "The Polipollutionists," *The Atlantic* 219:52-54.

6. "The Villains Are Greed, Indifference — and You," *Life* 59:96; as cited by L. K. Caldwell, *Environment* (New York: Natural History Press, 1970).

7. Though, as we shall see, the concept of "participation" is ambiguous. It means one thing when used by a liberal, but something quite different when used by, say, a socialist.

8. Following Peter Bachrach. See his *The Theory of Democratic Elitism* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1967).
9. (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1943).
10. *Introduction to Democratic Theory* (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 1960).
11. *Preface to Democratic Theory* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1956).
12. *Democratic Theory* (Detroit, Michigan: Wayne State University Press, 1962).
13. Bernard Berelson *et al.*, *Voting* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1954).
14. Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*, 1961 ed., p. 285.
15. "Power, Pluralism and Democracy: A Modest Proposal," *Proceedings of the American Political Science Association*, Chicago, 1964, p. 3.
16. *Loc. cit.*
17. Schumpeter, *op. cit.*, p. 283.
18. For example, see Berelson, *op. cit.*; L. W. Milbrath, *Political Participation* (Chicago: Rand McNally & Company, 1965); G. A. Almond and S. Verba, *The Civic Culture* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1965).
19. Berelson, *op. cit.*, pp. 312-16.
20. I was reminded of this point, and of the passage from Hobbes, by Michael Walzer's discussion of citizenship theory in *Obligations* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1970), p. 208.
21. Thomas Hobbes, *De Cive* [The Citizen] (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc.,) X, 9, p. 122.
22. This point is made by Carole Pateman in *Participation and Democratic Theory* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1970), p. 7.
23. Dahl, *Preface to Democratic Theory*, Appendix E.
24. Bachrach, *op. cit.*, p. 95.
25. *News from Nowhere; or An Epoch of Rest, Being Some Chapters from a Utopian Romance* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1966).
26. *The German Ideology*, Marx-Engels Gesamtausgabe, Vol. 1, Section 5 (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1938), pp. 63-64.
27. J. S. Mill, *Representative Government* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, Ltd., 1910), p. 217.
28. Hardin, *op. cit.*, p. 72.
29. I argue later that capitalist social and economic institutions are incompatible with a participatory society.
30. *The Social Contract and Discourses* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, Ltd., 1966) III, xv.
31. (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1954), p. 211.
32. Berelson, *op. cit.*, p. 316.
33. Bachrach, *op. cit.*, p. 32.
34. Berelson, *op. cit.*, p. 271-72.
35. *Loc. cit.* [italics added].

36. Bachrach discusses this point in some detail, *op. cit.*, pp. 72-73, 87-88, 96-98.
37. (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1954), p. 105.
38. Bachrach, *op. cit.*, p. 96.
39. *Essays on Politics and Culture*, ed. G. Himmelfarb (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1963), p. 229. Cited by Pateman. *op. cit.*, p. 30.
40. Almond and Verba comment that "the structure of authority at the workplace is probably the most significant — and salient — structure of that kind with which the average man finds himself in daily contact. . . ." *op. cit.*, p. 294.
41. See "Towards a Liberatory Technology" in *Post-scarcity Anarchism* (Berkeley, California: Ramparts Press, 1971).
42. It must be admitted, however, that in ordinary usage the term "participation" is used loosely to cover situations in which only some minimal amount of interaction takes place. To say that someone has participated in a decision may mean no more than that he was present during a group discussion of the matter.
43. For administrators (government or corporate) the object is often not to promote participation in decision-making, but rather to create a *feeling* of participation. To this end they recommend the adoption of such devices as "participatory leadership," in which decision-making power rests with a leader who is neither chosen by nor accountable to the group, but whose leadership induces them to endorse his decisions.
44. Richard Bocking offers, as an example of this phenomenon, the current federal-provincial Okanagan Basin study. This study accepts economic growth as a basic policy for the valley, "yet whether or not extensive growth should be encouraged is a contentious issue amongst residents of the valley." Bocking remarks that when such vital assumptions, which determine in large part the final outcome, are not subject to discussion, "public involvement" seems spurious. See *The Relationship of Water Development to the Canadian Identity* (Winnipeg, Manitoba: Agassiz Center for Water Studies, 1972), p. 35.
45. "Decisions and Nondecisions: An Analytical Framework," *American Political Science Review* 57(3):641-42.
46. Bocking, *op. cit.*, p. 35.
47. See Bocking, *op. cit.*, p. 32.
48. *Ibid.*, p. 34.
49. See John V. Krutilla, "Conservation Reconsidered," *The American Economic Review*, Vol. 57, 1967.
50. Paul Davidson, F. Gerard Adams, and Joseph Seneca, "The Social Value of Water Recreational Facilities Resulting from an Improvement in Water Quality: The Delaware Estuary," in *Water Research*, ed. A. V. Kneese and S. C. Smith (Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins Press for Resources for the Future, 1966).
51. *Democracy and Education* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1922), pp. 275-76.
52. Krutilla, *op. cit.*
53. See Peter L. Danner, "Affluence and the Moral Ecology," *Ethics*, Vol. 81, No. 4, July, 1972.
54. Two notable exceptions: F. E. Sparshott in *An Enquiry into Goodness* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1958), pp. 131 ff.; and David Braybrooke, "Let Needs Diminish That Preferences May Prosper," *American Philosophical Quarterly: Studies in Moral Philosophy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1968).

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