Green Thoughts on Deliberative Democracy

Mike Mills
London Guildhall University
&
Fraser King
Nottingham Trent University

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Abstract

There has been much work recently on deliberative democracy, and the idea appears to have much in common with green views of how democracy should operate to fulfil green goals. Yet greens themselves have been accused of being less committed to democracy than their rhetoric suggests. This paper, then, has two purposes; to establish whether, in principle it is fair to criticise greens for their democratic position in general and secondly to see whether their commitment to deliberative democracy in particular is defensible. We argue that while it is difficult to make the case that green values are incompatible with democracy per se, there do seem to be some problems for them if they argue for a peculiarly deliberative form of democracy. Mostly, these problems arise from the difficulties of reconciling the ethical imperative to avoid risks or not to act on uncertainties, with a belief that deliberation will necessarily produce the desired outcome.

Introduction

This paper looks at what can be gained from a consideration of the literature on deliberative democracy and green politics, notably green political theory. The argument will run as follows: many of the goals of green politics and deliberative democracy appear to be compatible and there are many greens that make this case. However, there are aspects of the recent critique of green democratic theory (and of environmental politics more generally) which raise issues about the deliberative process itself.

There seem to be four main aspects to this critique which may be useful here; that green thinking has an overtly instrumental view of democracy such that democracy may be dispensed with should it fail to achieve green goals; that there is simply an incompatibility between green values and democracy; that the values of greens are internally inconsistent and will, as a consequence privilege core ecological values over democracy; and that it is in the nature of environmental problems themselves that they pose particular problems for deliberation (notably, that they deal with risks and uncertainties, cross national boundaries, and have adverse effects on non-humans). Experience of green thinking in these areas suggest that while moves towards deliberation will invariably be helpful (Williams and Matheny, 1995; Jänicke, 1996),
there are two areas in particular where problems may arise. First, when values which seem to have an imperative independent and second, when risks and uncertainties enter the deliberative process.

The first part of the paper will deal with an outline of core green values and their place in green democratic theory, we will then move on to address the criticisms of greens with respect to democracy in general. Then, a closer look will be taken at the literature on deliberative democracy, and we will consider this in the light green values.

**Green Values**

It should be clear from the Introduction that some account of green values is necessary, firstly so that we can appreciate the nature of the critique of their ability to deliver democracy in general, and secondly to assess their suitability with deliberative democracy. We shall have to be brief, and in that brevity risk misrepresenting the range of green thinking – this, it seems, is unavoidable.

The distinctive feature of green values is the way in which it employs a *relational metaphysic*, that is, it sees humans as part of broader bio-systems the harmony or balance of which humans have the capacity to affect adversely. From this more or less factual statement are drawn a number of ethical conclusions concerning how we should behave. How this is done varies greatly between authors but it may include having an appreciation or respect for nature (Goodpaster, 1983; Paethke, 1995); recognising its intrinsic value (Rolston, 1975); social sympathy for nature (Callicott, 1983); attributing rights to animals (Regan, 1984) and so on.

The first point, then, that comes out of this relational metaphysic is that nature becomes *morally considerable* to an extent that it did not before. The ethical basis of this is is a matter of dispute between those who argue that nature should be considered for reasons of enlightened, human, self-interest (see for example, Haywood, T., 1995) and those who say that value exists in nature regardless of whether it constitutes a part of our perceived self interest. This distinction is important because when trade-offs are considered between the interests of humans and non-humans (economically, socially),
then clearly differences in the way these trade-offs will be made might emerge. The literature on sustainability demonstrates this point very well. Although there are many versions of this concept they all seem to have three central components – an ecological, a social (or human) and an economic and it is reconciling these in a way which is more or less sustainable which is the job of the concept (see, for example, Brown and Quibbler, 1994; Lipietz, 1995; Redclift, 1993; Merchant, 1996).

Most ideologies have a perception of how they would promote sustainability, but it is clear that the models vary according to which of the three components are believed to be most important. So, those with a deep green perspective argue that priority should be given to ecological balance (Naess, 1996); those from enlightened self interest say that the ecological cannot be resolved without first addressing social issues such as the redistribution of wealth (Redclift, 1993; Guha and Martinez-Alier, 1997); and those who prioritise the economic (who tend not to be particularly green) trust market mechanisms to resolve ecological and social problems.

Of course, if greens accept this relational view they are implicit critics of those who don’t and of the epistemological systems they represent. Consequently, it seems central to green values that the ultimate complexity of the universe is, if not unknowable, then, at the very least, very complex and we should be wary of claims to knowledge which suggest otherwise. This does not necessarily mean that greens refute the value of science, for example, but rather, that they tend to take a cautious approach when confronted with claims to knowledge, which do not appear grounded in an acknowledgement of its limits. In short, a logical outcome of the relational view is that there is a heightened perception of uncertainty, hazard and risk. We shall return to this point later.

Similarly, economic growth is not seen as a self-evident good if it does not exist within a framework, which acknowledges both the limits of our knowledge of the ecological and social effects of such growth. This is especially the case if it is not consistent with the fulfilment of other social goals such as the redistribution of wealth (or ecological costs) or self-development. Again, it is difficult to give a definitive ‘green’ view because authors vary, the important point seems to be that growth, or the freedom to
compete in markets, are not seen as ends in themselves in the same way that social democrats perceive markets as a means to a ‘higher’ ends.

Being green then is to accept, to a greater or lesser extent, that we inhabit a moral system broader than ourselves. Nevertheless, the ‘social’ and ‘political’ aspects of being green suggest a particular view of the social and political process that is consistent with models of democracy, which are essentially participatory. Not only is this viewed as being consistent with the development of ‘the self’ in the world but the process of democracy is seen as essential for the realisation of ecological goals:

…the realisation of a green agenda (in both the sense of recognising as well as achieving the goals of environmental reform) is contingent upon the reflexive articulation of the deeper moral sources of a radical democratic polity. (Barns, 1995, 103)

In addition, there are assertions made not only about democratic forms but also about the foundations of such forms. Hayward, B. (1996, 220-1) suggests the commitment to a participatory form of democracy is consistent with green views on; self-determination; their distrust of technocracy and the role of ‘experts’; the transformative effects of political participation; and their sense of what the good life actually entails. Paelhke (1995) and Janicke (1996) also suggest, as do others that such forms of democracy are actually helpful in so far as broader and deeper participation tends to promote green values more generally.

There is much more that could be said about green values, particularly the disagreements between greens and the qualifications to their arguments, but we hope there is enough here to avoid too much confusion so that we may now move on.

**Green Democracy**

Within green democratic theory it is possible to make the distinction (as Doherty and de Geus (1997) have done) between what might be called ‘survivalist’ and ‘participatory’ views on democracy. The former, generally associated with the work of Hardin (1967),
Heilbroner (1974), and Ophuls (1977), argued that democracy was unlikely to be flexible and foresighted enough to resolve what was perceived at that time to be an impending ecological disaster. On these accounts (which also go by the name of eco-authoritarianism) democracy at some, or all, levels may need to be by-passed for the sake of a more pragmatic use of natural resources, the distribution of public goods and so on when the inevitable catastrophe came. Although some of the criticisms of the survivalists were often overstated (Ophuls, for example, was keen to have as much democracy as an ecological crisis would allow), nevertheless, there is very little green democratic work that conforms to this model now. As Paehlke (1996) has argued, most of the assumptions upon which this view was based have turned out to be wrong.

It is not the survivalists, but the participatory theorists who have been the subject of the criticisms we are interested in. Participatory theories remain popular, whether they are associated with green parties, eco-socialists, or eco-radicals yet some of the criticisms of them tend to echo those made of survivalists. The model, very generally speaking, would seek to prioritise some form of discursive, communicative or deliberative form of democracy which would normally include some combination of the following; decentralisation; the public expression of ‘reasoned’ argument; open political structures which allow popular access and scrutiny; new means of participating which did not rely upon formal state institutions (perhaps through things like citizen councils); the incorporation of environmental concerns into basic constitutional and policy arrangements (e.g. environmental rights; animal rights; the precautionary principle); the opening up of dialogue between the different levels of the state; and improving the flow of information within the political system and between the state and citizenry (see, for example, Barns, 1995; Haywood, B, 1995; Dryzek, 1995). This model, or variations of it, now tends to be posited within a framework which accepts the ‘new realism’ (Eckersley, 1996), that is, one which looks to work within the basic structures of the liberal democratic state.

Of course, in such a broad model we can do little more than present a tendency in the literature that cannot do justice to the significant differences, which exist between

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2 Paehlke argues that ‘survivalists were wrong to 1) accept an apocalyptic model of environmental problems; 2) to believe that democracy was too fragile to deal with such problems; and 3) to believe that authoritarian methods would be effective.
authors. Nevertheless, at this stage, the important point is less the detail and more the
general ‘feel’ of a green conception of democracy – we shall return to the detail later.

In many ways, then, it does not seem unreasonable, on the basis of the above, to see
greens as ‘natural’ democrats. Not only does this seem to apply in so far as the form
and structure of democracy is concerned, but there also seems to be some agreement
about the effects such systems may have on the autonomy of individuals and their
personal development.

Recent debates within the green democracy literature, however, have suggested that this
‘natural compatibility’ needs to be unpacked a little before green claims to be natural
democrats will stand up to scrutiny. In particular, it has been claimed that some green
values, despite an overt commitment to democracy, do not seem, on closer inspection,
to be as compatible with it as greens suggest. It is reflecting on these debates which we
believe offers a way into the lessons offered to deliberative democracy from green
democratic thinking.

**The Critique of green Democracy**

The debate over green democracy centres largely on the work of Saward (1993) and
Goodin (1992) in which they argued that greens, who have very specific ecological
objectives, tend to view the democratic process simply as a means to an end and
consequently the value of democracy is contingent on it being able to deliver green
policy. In other words, to repeat the criticisms aimed at the survivalists, it is the
resolution of environmental problems, which should take precedence over democratic
procedure:

> 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 outcome? (Goodin, 1992, 168)
The suggestion, therefore, is that greens have incompatible goals and something (democracy) may be sacrificed for higher values.³

Furthermore, the values which greens tend to support (the intrinsic value of nature, for example) do not, at first glance at least, seem to support conventional views of democracy. The worry has been that by placing value upon non-human interests, the very ethical basis of democracy becomes subordinate to other, higher values. It is, for example, easy enough to argue the case for political equality within a particular species but new (though not insurmountable) problems arise if we extend that principle to other species. Similarly, if we believe that actions concerning the environment are better justified not in terms of enlightened human self-interest but should acknowledge the interests or value of other things, then many of the foundational principles of democratic theory need to be re-assessed. In short, there appears to be something incongruent between green values on the one hand, and their commitment to democracy on the other.

The problem, then, seems to be that in both of these cases (greens being instrumental with regard to democracy; having values incompatible with it) democracy takes on a contingent, limited, character offensive to democrats. In short, greens are accused of undermining both the principles and the preconditions of democracy. Let us say a little about these principles and preconditions before looking at 1) some of the green responses to the criticisms and 2) moving on to talk more particularly about deliberative democracy.

The primary feature of any democratic political community is that the exercise of state power is legitimated only by the collective decisions of free and equal members of that community – hence the definition of that community becomes an important issue for greens. Democracy amounts to:

…a mode of decision making about collectively binding rules and policies over which the people exercise control, and the most democratic arrangement to be where all members of the collectivity enjoy effective

³ Of course, this type of criticism need not be unique to Greens, it could just as easily be made of feminists.
equal rights to take part in such decision making directly - one, that is to say, which realises to the greatest conceivable degree the principles of popular control and equality in its exercise (Beetham, 1992:40).

There are many further meanings that might be attached to democracy with regard to the two conditions of political equality and popular control, however, this is as abstract as we need be. There are a number of principles and preconditions constitutive of the democratic process that most theorists would flag up. Saward, (1994; 1998) in particular, recognises this and follows both Sartori, (1987) and Elster, (1988) in considering democracy ‘self binding’. Here the logic at work is that democracy, being an open-ended way to reach collectively binding decisions, makes certain restrictions in order to preserve itself. Here, it is clear this is at the bottom of Saward’s critique, that is, that green views usurp the self-binding nature of democracy by undermining some of it’s preconditions. Equally, there needs to exist not only a commitment to democracy within that political community but beyond simple, formal legal equality, an equal say in the exercise of political authority. The usual way of defending political equality, (though not the only way) is to advance a set of rights (minimally, civil and political; maximally socio-economic) as the means by which a people might exercise control over the political process. These are generally considered as binding to the extent that their infringement constitutes a violation of the democratic process. Saward (1996) cites Harrison (1993) who argues that:

If democracy is a good, then its proper exercise is a good. Hence those things necessary for its proper exercise can be secured against itself. So we may properly have democratic rights which may not properly be removed by the vote of the majority … such things should be entrenched as rights not subject to control by the majority (Harrison, 1993 cited in Saward, 1996: 83).

Logically then, it is through these rights that a public may control the outcome of collectively binding decisions. Now these principles are not considered exhaustive, arguably many more things need to be in place for a fully functioning democracy. Dahl (1989: 220 - 222) gives a lengthy description of what these might be, for our purposes all we need note is that what we have described above constitute minimally qualifying principles and pre-conditions.
Green responses to the criticisms mentioned above have tended to focus, unsurprisingly, on the extent to which it is true to say that they challenge the principles and preconditions of democracy. To begin with such criticisms often rely upon the presumption that greens use an exclusively utilitarian ethic, that is, that the benefits of preserving eco-systems might outweigh those of the democratic process without being sufficiently grounded in the ‘right’ to prevent abuse of the system. Although it is possible to see greens in a utilitarian light (as Goodin, 1992, does) to do this exclusively rather misses the point of much green thinking. It would not, for example, be in accord with their views on the transformative properties of political participation. Eckersley (1996) has pointed out that it is equally justified to view greens as taking a deontological position on the environment – that species, habitats, resources and so on should be protected or promoted (or left alone) for their own sake perhaps through considering their autonomy in the way we view the autonomy of humans. This is important because it re-connects greens principles or values with green practice, the absence of such a connection being a central criticism levelled by Saward (1993).4

Similarly, Dobson (1996) argues that the link between democracy and environmentalism can be made in two ways – as an argument from principle (that is, that certain principles – such as autonomy - should be given voice in a green democratic polity), and as an argument from preconditions (that a precondition of democracy is an environment capable of sustaining life – a point strongly made by Dryzek, 1995). Both, in Dobson’s view are necessary and neither is necessarily harmful to the democratic process itself. Importantly, neither betrays a naïve instrumentalism. Sagoff (1988) – himself a liberal – argues strongly that liberal concerns that environmentalists will undermine liberal rights (one of the preconditions of democracy) are largely unfounded because environmental issues tend not to be of the type which challenge those particular rights. Of course, they may conflict with other values in general currency, but this does not make them undemocratic.

The green response, then, has been to anchor their instrumentalism in values they perceive to be compatible with democracy and which would, they believe, secure the

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4 This, of course, raises other difficulties as far as democracy is concerned, but these are not so much difficulties of seeing democracy in a contingent way, rather they are difficulties of
self-binding nature of democracy itself. But we should be aware that to have an instrumental view of democracy is not necessarily a problem in itself. It is possible to argue that many views of democracy are instrumental to the extent it is believed that democracy can deliver not only its own implicit values (such as equality, freedom, varying conceptions of the good and so on) but others as well (the development of virtues such as compassion and wisdom or a broader sense of moral obligation, say to other species). In this respect, greens are no different to anyone else and, if democracy is to be ethical at all, it is only ethical to the extent that it can deliver democratic and other values.

Secondly, it is perfectly possible to overstate the importance of democracy to the extent that all environmental, social, economic and political actions become subordinate to the one process, leaving very little which appears to be valuable independent of that process. Environmental change (deliberately managed) is no greater threat to democracy that economic change (Paehlke, 1996, 22) – in both cases there are limits set to the democratic process on the basis that other values (and benefits) exist and a presumption that all values are not subordinate to that of democracy in all cases. To be instrumental in our approach to democracy, then, is not the problem. Rather, the problem is one of whether it is possible that green values are simply not compatible with democracy. Further on, we shall reconsider this in the light of deliberative democracy.

**Values and Democracy**

We do not want to enter too deeply into the debate about green values and the various way in which they can be made to ‘fit’ democracy – others have done this far better than we could – and anyway, we have given some examples of this above. Rather, we will take a more general look at values to bring us to the point where it becomes clear that dealing with environmental risks is perhaps the central green (and deliberative) problem arising out of the green views on value and democracy.

introducing new considerations into democratic forms which have not been seen as ethically central previously.
So, what does it mean to have values, which are compatible with democracy? Well, the obvious way to go about this is to say in the first instance that the principles and preconditions of democracy – which we gave earlier - must exist in this set of values. It seems reasonable to say these do exist for greens but that other values, which are also held, may conflict with democratic values. We mentioned earlier that greens would: extend the realm of moral considerability; appear dubious about how far it is possible to know the consequences of our actions (and hence to act ethically); would be inclined to redistribute wealth and costs; are committed to the development of ‘the self’ and so on. So is it simply the case that values are either compatible with democracy or they are not? Well no, it is not as straightforward as that. It seems to us that we can formulate this in one of three ways:

- That values are compatible with democracy if they are essentially self-regarding – this would be the case with issues of conscience for example;
- If they were other-regarding but did not challenge the principles or preconditions of democracy – they related to the care of the environment but retained a belief in political equality for example;
- Or if they do adversely affect the principles or preconditions of democracy but produce benefits which are commonly regarded as beneficial and which will, ultimately, be the subject of some form of popular control. In short, they constitute another, collective, aspect of the good life – the obvious example here would be the operation of markets. Here, it might be more reasonable to talk of co-existence rather than compatibility.

Although there may be other ways in which values may be compatible with democracy the above will form at least part of any list which was generated for this purpose. This suggests that the test of compatibility, at any given point in time, rests with: (1) the need to submit values to the democratic process (choosing not to eat meat, for example, would not need submission); (2) the willingness to submit their values to the democratic process; (3) the point at which non-democratic benefits become democratic liabilities (when, for example, should corporations be regulated for environmental safety). This test applies, of course, on the basis that there are values other than those of democracy itself.
Now, we need to begin with re-stating a point we made earlier, which is that we must avoid the mistake of believing that there is a set of values which will always be compatible with democracy but which do not rest simply on a belief in democracy alone. We argue that it is not possible to imagine a set of values, which under all circumstances will always fulfil one of these tests however compatible it, may appear at the moment. The problem faced by greens is this respect, therefore, is not exclusive to them and is, perhaps, more a reflection on the limits of concepts themselves.

If, then, democratic systems will always accommodate other, higher, values which on paper may not be compatible with democracy under some circumstances then the test of compatibility rests not only with the individual values themselves but also with either a broader willingness to submit them to the democratic process or their general acceptance as part of ‘the good life’. There are, after all, many values, such as duty, obligation, responsibility and even certain rights and freedoms which, if taken to extremes, can be incompatible with democracy. In short, unless we are dealing with very extreme cases (such as a form of authoritarianism) it will never be possible unequivocally to establish the democratic credentials of any set of values. This, then, is the first general point that needs to be made about the compatibility of green values with democracy – that in the final analysis, we cannot prove it one way or the other.

The second point is that there does not seem to be anything intrinsic to the core values we gave earlier which suggests that, individually at least, they may cause problems for democracy. These values (employing a relational metaphysic; broadening the moral community; a sensitivity to risk and uncertainty; qualifying the need for economic growth as an end in itself; and a commitment to self development through participation) certainly do have their tensions and it is entirely understandable that a critique of them emerged largely on the basis of the struggle between green’s social and ecological principles and their political ones. However, if we accept the arguments of Eckersley (1996) and Dobson (1996) (given above) and if we accept also that tensions are unavoidable given the contingent nature of compatibility, then it might not be unreasonable to argue that there is not an incompatibility problem. Importantly, there does not appear to be an unwillingness to offer these values up to the democratic
process, but rather, to incorporate them into democratic structures as a consequence of their contingent acceptance. As we saw earlier, the normal qualification to the democratic process bringing into political being values higher than itself is that these values should not prevent the continuation of democracy and they are allowed to find political form only so long as they understand their own contingent acceptance. With this proviso in mind, there is little doubt that democracies do operate in this way and it is a great qualification to ‘democratic conceit’ that we acknowledge that not everything of value is held within the system of democracy itself – democracy can, and does defer on occasion, and not only for its own benefit – nor should it. Consequently, it is only the simplest of questions which can establish the contingent compatibility of green values with democracy: ‘Have we chosen to take these higher ecological values as an aspect of the good life?’, and, if we have, ‘Does the ability to change our mind still exist?’

In order to abuse the democratic process by failing to conform to the second of the tests of compatibility given above (by challenging the principles of preconditions of democracy when saying otherwise) it is difficult to conceive how this could be done without having achieved compatibility in the third sense (being perceived as a collective aspect of the good life). On this argument, at some point the more challenging aspects of green ideology will have to be generally accepted before the opportunity to become authoritarian even arises. In practical terms there does not seem to be any intrinsic reason why certain areas of political activity might not be subject to green values if this was generally agreed to provide, for example, a more ethical or more beneficial outcome. We could replace cost-benefit analysis with the precautionary principle; ‘ring-fence’ some areas of policy (perhaps those relating to sentient beings) as being the subject of higher values than those relating to others (say, recreation); regulate manufacturing methods on the basis of revised views of the risks, hazards and uncertainties involved and so on.

Does this mean that there is, in fact, nothing to discuss as far as green values and democracy are concerned and that greens have answered their critics? Well, no because for some critics this would be dodging the question. A third point, then, is ‘What if, taken as a package, these values are internally inconsistent and mutually exclusive?’
The obvious example is the one by Goodin given earlier - that the democratic process (necessary for self-development, legitimation and citizenship) may not produce outcomes consistent with green views on risk or the ethical imperatives that they believe to exist? In other words, they cannot have it both ways. Here, on first reading, the only fully convincing arguments appear to be those, which in the end privilege the democratic process over and above, higher green values. Paelhke for example, argues that democracy is the ‘trancendent value’ (1995) and should, therefore, take precedence when conflicts arise. We should not, after all, expect internal consistency if the arguments we gave earlier are correct and, so long as popular control is retained, perhaps a problem of principle or precondition does not exist. If we add to this the work of Dobson and Eckersley mentioned previously, which suggest that enough green values are compatible with democracy to secure the desired outcome, then it appears the criticism has, indeed been answered.

This is an argument, which, though defensible, has an element of unsatisfactoriness about it. We accept that if the primary concern is with the compatibility of green values with democracy then the above argument serves its purpose whether we are considering an aggregative or more deliberative model (see below). Equally, we have already said that it might not be reasonable to expect any ideology to be internally consistent as far as its relationship with democracy is concerned. Having said this, it should be possible to establish which form of democracy is most consistent with stated values and goals – after all, arguing that green democracy is defensible, as we have done, does not necessarily give much indication of whether it actually makes sense in its own terms.

We hope, in this section to have addressed, however briefly, some of the criticisms of green democracy but we are aware that our remit (to consider its compatibility with democracy) now seems quite narrow in comparison to the values themselves. To go further is to consider green values in the light of deliberative democracy, not, in terms of its compatibility for there seems little more to say on that. Rather, to return to the question of whether greens preferred form of democracy is as consistent with their other values as they suggest.

**Deliberative Democracy**
We have seen that many of the green proposals for democracy have a lot in common with those generally described as ‘deliberative’. We shall be arguing in this section that this model presents some problems for the implementation of some green values. However, it is also true that many of the difficulties are not peculiarly green, that is, that the deliberative model presents problems for anyone with an interest in reason and value in democracy. Consequently, before we move on to look specifically at green reason and green value, we must first consider the deliberative model more generally and our understanding of it.

Whilst deliberative democracy has been the main site in attempting to reconcile green values with democracy, it has also become a fixed feature in the landscape of radical democratic theory, though there is a lack of clarity about what is actually meant by deliberative democracy and how it is constituted. Clearly, there is a commitment to more open public reasoning, but this commitment comes in various guises. The following explores the current themes in this thinking and goes on to question how much currency greens might invest in a putative deliberative scheme of democracy, and whether or not it proves a fruitful way to connect the two.

Deliberationists (the name which we shall adopt, maybe unfairly, for all these views) contrast the process of merely aggregating preferences (usually in the form of votes) with what have been referred to as the transformation of preferences by virtue of argument or bargaining. The focus has primarily been upon process. That is to say attention has been paid to; the distortions of power in decision making (Habermas, 1990; 1994); the lack of voice or ‘presence’ in liberal democratic forms (Phillips, 1995) and the restricted access of marginalised groups whose realisation of political equality stretches barely beyond the formal (Cohen, 1996; 1998). This distinction between aggregative and transformative models of democracy is true for all models of deliberation that appear in the existing literature, although the reasons behind a faith in, and a commitment to, deliberation and/or communication differ.

The aggregative process, then, encourages organised interests and individuals to determine for themselves, in isolation, what leaders, decisions and policies best serve
their perceived interests (Young, 1996: 120). Critics of this model (Habermas, 1990; 1993; 1994; 1996; Cohen, 1996; 1998; Young, 1996; Barber, 1984; 1996; Dryzek, 1990; Fishkin; 1991; Phillips, 1995; 1996; Elster, 1998; Sunstein, 1998) take issue with the democratic process thus conceived. In various ways, and again for different reasons, they critique this atomised view of the political as irrational and are concerned about the absence of any systematic public reflection about needs and goals (Young, 1996, 121). Young comments that:

…the aggregative outcome…has no necessary rationality and itself has not been arrived at by a process of reasoning. People need not leave their subjective point of view to take a more objective or general view of political issues…the interest based model of democracy also presumes that people cannot make claims on others about justice or the public good and defend those claims with reasons (Young, 1996, 121).

Deliberative models by contrast, imagine an active citizenry, oriented toward reaching a consensus, or the common good, who publicly reason collective goals, aims and decisions by a process of discussion. Deliberation encourages the public articulation of preferences toward publicly justifiable goals. In this scheme, individuals and organisations present their arguments in a forum of free and open dialogue and are subsequently challenged by others who test, by a process of public reasoning, the arguments given. There is a burden upon the deliberators to carefully and reasonably distinguish between ‘good and bad’ reasoning and to ignore or dismiss ‘rhetorical flourishes’ (Young, 1996,121). The deliberative process continues until agreement about the common good can be reached. However, the term ‘deliberation’ does not in itself capture the diverse meanings attached to this form of democratic thinking and it will be necessary to clarify this more accurately.

Jurgen Habermas (1996) contrasts liberal or ‘Lockean’ views of democratic politics with both republican and a ‘discourse theoretic’ reading of democracy. The former relies upon a conception of government as:

…an apparatus of public administration and society as a market structured network of interactions among private persons. Here
politics...has the function of bundling together and pushing private interests against a government apparatus specialising in the administrative employment of political power for collective goals (Habermas, 1996, 21).

This fits with the distinction given by Young, but Habermas’ treatment of deliberation is a far more ethical process than that which obtains in Young’s account. Republicans, he notes, bring us closer to the democratic ideal in terms of the ‘institutionalisation of a public use of reason’ (Habermas, 1996, 23). Republicans tend to favour an increase in deliberation because only through collective communication can members of a political community locate the common good and confer ‘legitimating force upon political opinion and will formation’. For theories of this sort, a simple aggregation of preferences through the private exercise of political rights cannot hope to reveal the basis of the common good for such a reason exists outside the logic of individual preference formation. Contemporary republicans tend to give a communitarian twist to their reasoning, and deliberation in this sense is justified with reference to values which exist within our public political culture and can be found in our traditions and shared understandings. This view is not common to republican thinkers, however, as Barber, (1984) and Miller, (1993) both regard the process of deliberation as necessary for efficient decision-making, others for the legitimation of state actions (Hirst, 1994). Whereas the republican conception invites a deeper reading of popular decision making and typically involves more than the mediation of preferences, Habermas suggests that the ‘communitarian’ reading of republican thinking makes a move toward the ‘ethical constriction of public discourse’ an opposition to which lies at the heart of what he calls the ‘discourse ethic’. The problem here is that deliberation is restricted to those values that can be found in the community. For liberal democracies this becomes problematic. Here the values of freedom, equality and liberty that republicans would locate, coexist with a strong belief in the market. How is a deliberative forum expected to resolve a value conflict such as this without recourse to some abstract reasoning extant to the political community and the public political culture? Needless to say, the same problems will arise for greens.

When Habermas talks about deliberation he is, by contrast, referring to this ‘discourse ethic’ (1990; 1993; 1994), which he regards as the means by which the conditions for
deliberation may be addressed. He seems to assume that ‘free’ and ‘undistorted’ conditions are implicit in the acceptance of the discourse ethic and that these approximate to the willingness of the deliberators (although Habermas rarely uses this term) to understand the importance of the interests of others and consider them rationally against their own claims. In such conditions ‘the force of the better argument’ can resolve the goal of discourse: the reconciliation of competing interest claims and the reconstruction of the terms in which a decision may be regarded as legitimate. Habermas appears to be more concerned with establishing universally fair procedures for deliberation than any systematic restriction or binding of outcomes, this is explicit in his critique of the republicans.

Joshua Cohen (1991; 1996; 1998) and John Dryzek (1990) give a further conception of deliberation, which follows in this vein. Again, the working model for deliberation does not predetermine the outcomes of deliberation, rather it is concerned with establishing rules for fair deliberative conduct so that we can be sure the outcome is legitimate and is seen to have followed fair procedures. In particular, Cohen, attentive to the unfair distribution of power in aggregative democratic forms, wants to go beyond mere discussion, which he regards as essential to any intelligent idea of democratic decision making, and conceptualise deliberative democracy as ‘free and public reasoning amongst equals’. Cohen argues:

According to an aggregative conception of democracy, then, decisions are collective just in case they arise from arrangements of binding collective choice that give equal consideration to - more generically, are positively responsive to - the interests of each person bound by the decisions. According to a deliberative conception, a decision is collective just in case it emerges from arrangements of binding collective choice that establish conditions of free public reasoning among equals who are governed by the decisions. In the deliberative conception, then, citizens treat one another as equals not by giving equal consideration to interests…but by offering them justifications for the exercise of collective power framed in terms of considerations that can, roughly speaking, be acknowledged by all as reasons (Cohen, 1998, 186).
Dryzek (1990) gives a similar account again, predicated by a commitment to a communicative, as opposed to an instrumental, rationality. Under these conditions social interaction is freed from external constraints such as domination and deception and the only authoritative claims are those of the better argument. Indeed like Habermas and Cohen, Dryzek sees no basis for an ‘ethical constriction on outcome’ and makes the point forcefully:

> Communicative rationality is best thought of as a procedural standard, dictating no substantial resolution about values to be pursued (Dryzek, 1990, 54).

There is a strong commitment to egalitarianism in all these accounts and in each case there is an attempt to go beyond the application of private rights. Cohen’s argument is predicated by what he calls the ‘fact of reasonable pluralism’. He defines this, much like Rawls, as the absence of a comprehensive moral doctrine and argues for a:

> …conception of democracy suited to the kind of human difference captured in the "fact of reasonable pluralism" - the fact that there are distinct, incompatible understandings of value, each one reasonable, to which people are drawn under favourable conditions for the exercise of their practical reason (Cohen, 1996, 96).

Now, what are we to make of this set of propositions, and what value is there in this for greens? There is clearly a modus operandi at work here, which is explicitly aimed at increasing public discussion of issues, there is a clear commitment to egalitarianism and there is a clear commitment to something which Cohen calls ‘free and public reasoning amongst equals’. In many ways there is a lot here which may be useful to greens: a commitment to equality, a commitment to more localised decision making and the absence of exclusionary practices based upon an uneven distribution of power.

However, there are a number of cautionary points as far as we can see in recommending this to greens. First, there is the question of values. Habermas, and Cohen are clearly concerned with locating a procedural ethic, which in terms of how a discursive fora is constituted leaves the values which may be deliberated upon, notwithstanding the preconditions already mentioned, to be discretely factored out. However, in some models, notably communitarian models of deliberation there is a commitment to
locating the common good from values implicit in the public culture of political communities. In short, there does not seem to be anything inherent in the idea of deliberative democracy which suggests values have to be in or out of the deliberative process – the argument has to be made in favour of one or the other.

Having said this, it is doubtful whether any democratic forum, deliberative or otherwise, is value free and it would appear best to proceed on the basis that values will always exist. Sagoff (1992) has argued that the problem of decision-making, as far as values are concerned, is not that values exist, but rather that they are not made explicit. He goes so far as to say (1992, 194-5) that the scientific basis of decisions is secure so long as the values implicit in scientific judgements are clearly stated.

The second main point of concern relates to the conditions for communicative rationality, which appear to be quite narrowly constituted. The restriction, which is as much a matter of institutional design as it is of ethics, to all reasonable claims that may be regarded as reasonable by others, leaves very little room to manoeuvre for greens. Habermas (1993), in particular restricts the realm of communicative rationality to communicatively competent persons. The strong anthropocentric line taken here seems to rule out the moral considerability of the non-human world by definition. Clearly, much rides on what we believe communication to be (Dryzek’s more expansive (1995) definition seems much more helpful in terms of expanding the moral community) and the moral weight we place on reason or rationality. We will return to this point later.

Thirdly, there is a general critique of deliberative models. The general theme of the deliberationists case is to contrast the aggregative with the transformative, which in Cohen’s case boils down to ‘free and public reasoning by equals’. But what is actually meant by removing the aggregative character of democratic decision making? Saward, (1998) has expressed some concern at these constructions and comments that surely at some point a decision has to be made. Cohen (1998), rightly contends that any intelligent model of decision making needs discussion (regardless of the level), but by the same token any credible model of democracy has, at some point, to aggregate preferences. Opinions have to be taken, and heads counted. Deliberationists are ambiguous over the actual reality of decision making, the nearest we get is Cohen’s
(1996) suggestion that deliberative fora ought to be established within political parties. Whilst the concern for a deeper process of public reasoning is laudable this seems to take place wholly within existing aggregative structures (Saward, 1998, 64-65).

The deliberative model of democracy, then, signposts a number of key areas of green concern alluded to earlier both in our consideration of their values and their commitment to deliberative or participatory forms of democracy. As we said at the end of the previous section, although greens appear to have this commitment, this does not necessarily mean that, in terms of their values, it might be the best form of democracy for them. This, then, is the subject of the following section.

**Risk, Ethics and Deliberative Democracy**

Earlier on we said that to take a relational view of our relationship with nature was, by implication, to have a heightened awareness of the level of ecological and social risk – particularly if this is taken in conjunction with a sceptical view of the ability of science to resolve ecological problems. We should be clear at the beginning of this section that our pursuit of the issues of risk and uncertainty is, in some ways, selective. Lafferty and Meadowcroft (1996, 4) have argued the issue of the environment causes governments problems for four reasons and in each of these cases there lay a challenge to not only to governments, but to our way of viewing democracy; there is a knowledge deficit (there are often risks and uncertainties which make meaningful dialogue difficult); there are complex geographical patterns of impact and causation with environmental problems; solutions to these problems often suggest that there should be a redistribution of losses and gains both nationally and internationally; and the time scale effects of these problems is generally long and apparently arbitrary – contrary to political cycles. Lafferty and Meadowcroft are not the only ones to suggest that there are aspects of environmental problems which offer very particular challenges to liberal democracy in general, but to forms of deliberative democracy in particular.

Doherty and de Geus (1996, 7), use the example of pollution boundary problems to suggest that the form of the democratic community may need to be reconsidered when such problems have; a transnational effect; an intergenerational effect; and a trans-
species effect. So, it appears that environmental problems can pose particular problems for a process of democracy, and these seem to fall into the following categories:

- **Risk and Uncertainty** – what are implications of pervasive risks and unquantifiable hazards on a decision making process?
- **Are Ecological Concerns Social Problems or Ecological Problems?** – is it the case that moral considerability should largely be confined to humans, or, do environmental problems suggest a broadening of that community to other species or future generations?
- **The Democratic Community** – does the intra- and inter-national nature of environmental problems affect the levels and processes of democracy?

As we have said, we are only going to consider the first of these potential problems; the second we have alluded to as a question of principle or value the arguments around which we have already mentioned; and the last simply feels beyond the scope of this paper, important though it undoubtedly is. Equally, in much of what follows it is possible to anticipate what a green response might be to the qualifications to deliberation we would make, however, it seems important to make these arguments nevertheless.

Even greens who are committed to deliberative forms of democracy do so on the basis that some green values have already been incorporated into the decision making process – that process is then left to operate according to those, and other values, but the process trumps the temptation to prioritise outcomes. As we have said, in this respect, the cases of greens and those of Republicans and feminists have something in common. We are not, therefore, concerned so much with the democratic credentials of greens per se, but rather, considering their values in relation to deliberative democracy.

So, there are a number of issues, which arise out of our consideration of deliberative democracy which have implications for green views on risk and uncertainty. Beck (1992), though not green by our definition, nevertheless, suggests that current risks have a particular character: they are pervasive that is to say; global; irreversible; calculus does not apply to them; there is no insurance against them; their reach is socially
(ecologically?) unlimited; we need science to discover them; and they are the unintended consequence of the normal operation of our society. Such risks would include those associated with civil and military nuclear capabilities, the effects of inorganic pesticides and herbicides, genetically modified foods, the ingestion or inhalation of toxic substances from vehicle emissions and chemical plants as well as things like global warming and the hole in the ozone layer. This would be very much in accord with green thinking but of course would have a more local and perhaps more tangible form also. Things such as road safety, the siting of large industrial plants, health and safety at work, the local use of agro-chemicals, food hygiene, the disposing of household or industrial waste and so on are the primary local manifestations of these more pervasive risks.

Now, it is in the nature of risk that we need values even to define them. Although there is some disagreement over whether it is useful to talk of objectively existing risks, as opposed to socially constructed ones, there is little doubt that our perception of risk is crucial to our acting upon it (Fiorino, 1996) and, presumably, values are at least a part of perception. Our first point, then, is that values in the deliberative process will be necessary in order to identify risks (and uncertainties – risks or hazards which cannot be quantified). Moreover, it will often be the case, we suggest, that those values will need to be addition to those necessary for democracy (rights and equality, for example). It will certainly entail consideration of future generations and may well include the well being of non-humans (as might be the case in deliberating over factory farming, for example). If current risks have the character Beck suggests, it is not credible to believe that at each level of the political system these may be dealt with as the natural consequence of the deliberative process. In short, we are suggesting that the deliberative process cannot proceed without factoring-in values and it is best to make these explicit. Rather than skew the democratic process, we follow Sagoff (1992) in believing that the decision making (deliberative) process is, in fact, skewed when the existence of extra-democratic values is denied.

Secondly, there seem to be two assumptions about the transition from an aggregative to a deliberative form of decision making which, in themselves seem dubious, and which have strong implications for our treatment of risk. The first of these is a belief that not
only the form of decision making but also the individual perceptions of participants will change as a result of institutional change. That is, that in aggregative systems people do not leave their subjective preferences behind when making political choices, but that they will (or are more likely to) in a deliberative system.\(^5\) This transformation of consciousness may indeed come about, but it may not. It may be that we simply shift from the private holding of subjective preferences to the public conflict of such preferences. If this is so, then important risk issues at both the broader (pervasive) level and at the local level will not necessarily be resolved and, indeed, positions may become more entrenched and divided than ever. Indeed, it may be possible to argue that it is at the local level, where the transformative effects of deliberation might be expected to be most noticeable, that people are less likely to let go of their subjective preferences.

The second assumption concerning this transition is that some consensual or agreed decision is the outcome of the deliberative process – in short, that there is a faith in responsible and reasoned argument to produce agreed outcomes. This conclusion does rather rely on the premise of leaving subjective preferences behind being true or reasonable. Dobson (1996) is not so sure that this will actually happen, that is, that some consensus will emerge and we, too, find this a difficult assumption to work with. We could take this point a little further. Hayward, B. (1995) follows Young (1995) in suggesting that reasoned argument itself would tend to privilege some interests over and above others. How do we ensure that the inarticulate, the symbolic and non-conceptual means of expression are incorporated into the deliberative process? It does seem, on paper, a peculiarly middle-class model. If we cannot assume a consensual outcome how, then, are decisions to be made?

As far as risk and uncertainty are concerned, then, the changes that may occur as a result of a shift from aggregative to deliberative systems of democracy are not unproblematic. It is by no means certain that we can rely on the deliberative process to attend to risks and uncertainties in the way their nature suggests they deserve. While it may be that the retention of subjective preferences helps to reduce the risks which any individual is willing to subject themselves to, by definition, this may not help the more general difficulty of reducing risks to others given the pervasive nature of the risks themselves.

\(^5\) It seems to us that not many academics leave their subjective preferences behind when they enter deliberative forums – they don’t often change their minds either.
This is not an argument for authoritarianism, but rather one meant to suggest that a qualified deliberative process might suit green purposes better than they think. We will return to this point in a moment. The crucial thing here seems to be, as Saward (1998) has asked, whether and at what point do we actually aggregate preferences?

Let us now return to the point we made in an earlier section when we said that it was possible for democracies to bring into being values higher than themselves and put this together with the point that we cannot rely on the deliberative process to produce a consensus or agreement on ethical issues. Hayward, T. (1997, 67-85)\textsuperscript{6} – following Kant makes the point that no act is one of moral indifference – we must always reflect to establish the consequences of our actions. If we have moral obligations to others (let’s leave aside the question of what is morally considerable for the moment) then it will always be the case under conditions of uncertainty or risk, that we are obliged to take the least risky option because we do not know what the consequences of doing otherwise might be. Again, we are not saying that this means we should not deliberate if that is what people choose to do, but rather, that we should be clear about the boundaries of such deliberation. While the arguments for deliberation cited by Hayward, B. above all had a strong ethical basis, here we have an equally compelling argument suggesting that regardless of the deliberative process there are certain things we cannot or should not do. What these are, of course, depends on the values we incorporate into the model, but from a green perspective, we might expect at the very least some trade-off between the amount and scope of deliberation on the one hand, and the willingness to take pervasive, irreversible risks on the other.

Yet green views on the virtues of deliberative democracy were clear. Hayward, B. (1996, 220-1) was cited earlier as saying that participatory forms of democracy were consistent with green views on self determination; their distrust of technocracy and the role of experts; the transformative effects of political participation and their sense of what the good life actually entails. Barns (1995, 103), it will be remembered, linked a radical (deliberative) polity with the ability to articulate deeper moral sources. Our position is simply that we query whether the deliberative process will always tap into a

\textsuperscript{6} To be fair, Hayward does not believe that this principle can be applied to ‘the environment’, but, at the most, other species – for him there needs to be ‘morally relevant similarities’ (1997,70) between agents for the argument to be intelligible.
deeper moral vein which has, as yet, remained unexposed, and we query also the extent
to which we should be willing to take risks with the deliberative process when it comes
to things such as the treatment of animals, the preservation of landscapes, or more
pervasive societal and ecological risks. It is perfectly possible to hold experts
accountable, to exercise self-determination, to be transformed by political participation
and to experience our own sense of the good life without deliberating on all things, all
of the time. We may choose to ring-fence some policy areas, or to introduce values
(such as those represented by the precautionary principle) which at the very least set the
boundaries of deliberation and, at most, appeal to values higher than those of
deliberation itself.

Empirically, there is evidence to support the idea that not only do environmental
political issues tend to push the decision making in a deliberative direction anyway, but
that where this does happen, policy is ‘better’ as a consequence. Janicke (1996, 77)
argues that ecological questions have pushed political modernisation in countries such
as Japan, the Netherlands, Sweden and Germany and the changes he cites (more
participation, decentralisation, self-regulation, intervention and dialogue structures) all
have a deliberative feel to them. He further says:

    In general, it is not the mere existence of environmental policy
institutions, which account for positive output, but the way these
institutions are influenced by underlying conditions. (Janicke, 1996,
77)

By ‘underlying conditions’ we take him to mean that successful policy is not an ‘end of
pipe thing’ by a societal process (1996, 77). There is obviously little that can be
objected to in this view of political modernisation and it is no part of our argument to
disagree with the idea that successful policy requires societal input. However, we would
be inclined to suggest that this is a process within an essentially aggregative system, a
system which retains those core structures within which broader or more pervasive
social values may be embedded and around which it is possible to anchor otherwise
heterogeneous political demands. Our concern is that there comes a point at which the
obvious virtues of moves in a deliberative direction become societal (and, of course,
ecological) liabilities. We cannot say at what point that will arise, but we suggest that
until there is a little more clarity on what might be the ‘binding’ element of a
deliberative polity (besides simply a faith in the loss of subjective preferences) then we may need to retain some of the vices of aggregative systems.

Conclusion

This paper has had two broad purposes. The first was to address some of the criticisms of green views of democracy as being either incompatible with democracy or simply too instrumental. We hope we have shown that while it was reasonable to make the accusation, the green position is as defensible as ideology will allow. The second purpose was to consider whether the green commitment to deliberative democracy in particular was compatible with their other values. On this we believe that although deliberation clearly helps in some areas (transformation, self development) we are dubious about whether it is, at present, the best way of securing green outcomes as far as risks and uncertainties are concerned. Because risk reflects what might be seen as the key green value (a relational metaphysic) and because we can imagine the deliberative model having a disaggregating effect as far as the accommodation of ecological and social values are concerned, we suggest that some aspects of a more aggregative form of democracy are actually helpful to greens at this stage.
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