

# Ethics, Green Citizenship and Globalization

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This paper considers the ethical basis of environmental citizenship and the potential role for environmental citizenship in what has been called the democratization of international relations. The paper also argues that this global scale democratization process, thus far more dream than demonstrable reality, is necessary (though not necessarily sufficient) to the restoration of effective *domestic* democracy that more effectively engages more than economically self-interested minorities. Without ethical engagement citizens are less likely to participate more than minimally and cynically. Environmental citizenship conceived as the pursuit of sustainability has the potential to establish, for some, a sense of ethical engagement in civic life – a sense that has been eroded by the monolithic pursuit of national (economic) competitiveness that I have called economism.<sup>1</sup>

The paper also argues that environmental citizenship is irretrievably linked to the global scale and as such is essentially, in part at least, citizenship without a state. This global focus exists for many reasons.<sup>2</sup> One is that environmental problems are themselves increasingly global scale problems – climate change, ozone depletion, habitat loss, POPs, and many other issues manifest themselves at the global or regional scale and can only be resolved through concerted and comprehensive international action. More than that, of course, without global environmental and social standards improved economic competitiveness is achieved in part through reduced (or unimproved) domestic environmental and social standards and expenditures. At the same time, on the individual ethical level, environmental citizenship can be seen as a set of obligations that individuals owe to the life forms that the earth sustains and to the earth itself.

It is, of course, curious to speak of environmental rights at the global scale in the absence of state and society, but it is not impossible that if a system of global governance were to evolve (that was more than the economic system that exists at present) there might be some expectation of, for example, a planet-wide right to clean drinking water.<sup>3</sup> In general though, when we speak of human rights (as global scale rights), we refer to essentially civil rights not political, social or environmental rights. However, in terms of

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Paehlke, *Democracy's Dilemma: Environment, Social Equity and the Global Economy* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003).

<sup>2</sup> For an extended discussion on this point that includes Canadian constitutional, political, economic, and bio-physical dimensions see Robert Paehlke, "Spatial Proportionality: Right-sizing Environmental Decision Making," in Edward A. Parson, ed., *Governing the Environment* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), pp. 73-123.

<sup>3</sup> Such a claim is asserted in, for example, Maude Barlow and Tony Clarke, *Blue Gold: The Battle Against Corporate Theft of the World's Water* (Toronto: Stoddart, 2002).

environmental rights we could be said to have shared access to the planet's warmth (compared to outer space) as well as to air (of varying quality). On a global scale, even access to clean water, the most problematic of the three, is more widely and reliably available than are civil (human) rights. Needless to say a fuller and more reliably and widely available array of environmental rights will involve a long-term effort.

Despite the modest nature of reliably available environmental rights, environmental citizenship carries with it a splendid array of duties. One hardly knows where to begin. Environmental citizenship carries a duty to avoid when possible polluting air or water or imposing upon any common property resources, including living resources – wildlife and its habitat, forests, prairies, oceans, wetlands, deserts or even one's own backyard. There is even, arguably, some obligation to enhance those spaces over which one has nominal control – protecting soil, enriching biodiversity, and/or providing a welcoming setting for wild nature – birds, insects, small animals and the diverse plant species that feed them. More than that, environmental citizens are obliged to understand and to limit the impositions on nature brought about by our individual consumption habits as well as the collective consumption habits of the families, communities or even nations of which we are a part. To that later end there is arguably a corresponding obligation to participate in political processes.

Environmental citizenship is thus more about duties than rights. Curiously, it does not often appeal to conservatives who I suspect often presume that duties, for which they have an uncommon inclination, are owed either to them or to the state (within which they are typically not without influence). Conservatives (or at least Burke), however, should be credited with appreciating that all duties and rights are rooted in historic traditions and social habits and have no real existence outside of those traditions and habits. Modern conservatives seem largely to have forgotten that. Environmental citizenship also vastly exceeds the visions of liberal conceptions of citizenship, even the most advanced as articulated, for example, by T. H. Marshall.<sup>4</sup>

Environmental citizenship can be seen an addition to Marshall's classic assertion of three elements of citizenship as: civic, political, and social. Environmental citizenship adds a fourth element and the concept of sustainability, I will argue, may prove to be important to establishing the rights of social citizenship at the global scale, an initiative necessary to protecting (and in some cases restoring) those rights at the domestic level. That restoration and maintenance is the central challenge of the twenty-first century especially in a context of the economic, social and environmental bounds likely to be imposed by a transition to a post-fossil fuel world.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> The first work with which I am familiar to make the link between environmental citizenship and the work of Marshall is Hartley Dean, "Green Citizenship," *Social Policy & Administration* 35 (December 2001), pp. 490-505.

<sup>5</sup> See here, for example, Richard Heinberg, *The Party's Over: Oil, War and the Fate of Industrial Societies* (Gabriola Island, B. C.: New Society Publishers, 2003) and Andrew Dobson, *Justice and the Environment* (New York: Oxford UP, 1998).

Classic liberalism advanced civic and political inclusiveness and the opportunities for wider democratic participation (removing property requirements and gender restrictions). Socialism and social liberalism (in Hobhouse's sense) created the social citizenship associated with the welfare state.<sup>6</sup> Environmentalism can be understood, essentially, as a part of this long process, as a set of political ideas that broadens that inclusiveness further by encompassing future generations and other species. Interestingly, such an inclusion returns us irretrievably to Burke's fundamentally conservative notion of virtual representation (whereby non-landowning persons were virtually represented by landowners from their communities even though they themselves did not at the time have a right to vote). If only forest-floor fungi and the unborn could vote, environmental advocacy would get a lot easier. Most paper would be made from hemp and SUVs would be illegal.

Marshall argued in 1950 that the basic rights of citizenship (within English society) had evolved over several centuries.<sup>7</sup> Assured citizen access to hard-won civil rights (freedom of speech, assembly, press, religion, as well as the right to own property, conclude contracts and have access to justice) expanded to include political rights (voting and related rights and duties) primarily over the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century via the reform acts of 1832, the 1860s and 1880s that gradually lowered property requirements for male suffrage. Citizenship's civil and political rights then expanded to include basic *social* rights through the effective use of the other two (as industrialization and ultimately mass production advanced the level of prosperity). As Marshall put it: "The modern drive toward social equality is, I believe, the latest phase in the evolution of citizenship which has been in continuous progress for 250 years." (p. 78)

Marshall saw these three types of rights of citizenship as mutually reinforcing. The franchise protects civil rights and civil rights are essential to the effectiveness of voting and the functioning of parliament. But, social and economic minimums are also essential to both and had, in his view, come to be an essential aspect of citizenship itself by the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Social citizenship, he said, provided a right to a modicum of economic welfare and security and to live a life of a civilized being according to the standards prevailing in society at the time.

In short, many wealthy nations had gone beyond the 80-hour week, where young children worked in mines and perhaps a majority of families lived in relentless and total squalor. Such commonplace 19<sup>th</sup> century living and working conditions rendered the civil and political rights all but meaningless for some. All citizens were equally free, as Marx noted, to sleep under bridges at night, but only some could effectively utilize civil and political rights in the absence of at least 'a modicum of economic welfare and security'.

Despite the fact that social equity within most wealthy nations has moved backwards over recent decades we remain a very long way from the conditions of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, at least in terms of the proportion of society that experienced those conditions as

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<sup>6</sup> L.T. Hobhouse, *Liberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964).

<sup>7</sup> T.H. Marshall and T.B. Bottomore, *Citizenship and Social Class* (London: Pluto Press, 1992). Page references in the text refer to this edition.

a matter of course. Nonetheless, sometime late in the 20<sup>th</sup> century we clearly lost that sense of progress regarding social equality and the expansion of civil and political citizenship into new dimensions that Marshall felt. Marshall's words seem to describe a more buoyant, optimistic and prosperous time, yet when he wrote wealth per capita within wealthy nations was far below what it is today. Forces of social and political progress today rarely aspire to more than slowing the rate of decline in social equity. And, both political citizenship and civil rights are in decline in the face of the widespread decline in social capital that Robert Putnam has so eloquently observed (as well as the hard realities of global economic integration and terrorism).

A reconceptualization of citizenship cannot in and of itself reverse these multifaceted declines. However, if widely understood and accepted, it might partially restore the ethical optimism of that earlier era and help to focus citizenship at the level where many of the above-mentioned declines of the social, the political and the civil aspects of citizenship are rooted: the global scale.

### **Environmental Citizenship and *Democracy's Dilemma***

Globalization does not, however, simply generate an unambiguous race to the bottom socio-economically or environmentally. Some nations, those at the cusp of industrialization are clearly able to launch an export-driven rise out of desperation. Japan perhaps did it first and has been followed by Taiwan, Korea, Hong Kong, Singapore and Malaysia. China and India are now advancing dramatically. Internal inequality is rising within those nations as a middle class and a capitalist/bureaucratic class arises and inequalities are increasing within wealthy nations as industrial and mobile service jobs are exported to these nations and others. But, on a global scale inequality is not increasing as whole nations such as China lift themselves out of poverty at the expense of declining numbers North American steelworkers and light manufacturing workers are supplanted by growing numbers of Walmart greeters and cashiers.

Globalization *has* created downwards pressure on social programs and on corporate taxation so that domestic industries might compete, in Canada's case, with low tax rates in the United States and lower wages in Mexico (and almost everywhere else save Europe). And, global economic integration, combined with explicit environmental policy resistance within the United States and elsewhere, imposes some downward pressure on domestic environmental protections within many nations only partially offset by technology transfers and the so-called California effect (upward pressure on environmental standards within products exported to wealthy environmentally-oriented jurisdictions).<sup>8</sup> The exception here appears to be Europe where there is a sufficiently large market and sufficient wealth and a broad-based desire to see through environmental policy advances.

For altogether sensible reasons (doubts regarding the possibility of effective democracy at that scale and fears regarding the opportunities for global-scale malfeasance), few advocate global government. The United States has obviously recently

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<sup>8</sup> The California effect and its limits are discussed in *Democracy's Dilemma*, at pages 20-1.

moved in the opposite direction at full speed, developing an ever-increasing capacity for unilateralism and undermining almost every imaginable baby step toward global governance and international law, let alone global government.

At the same time, trade agreements seem to most people (including those involved in the process) more than sufficiently complicated and difficult to achieve without an approach to trade that seeks to incorporate social and environmental factors. This is a mistake. Cross-national cooperation could significantly lessen economic competition based on lower taxes, shrinking social programs and restrained environmental standards. This approach is somehow assumed to be a barrier to trade, a violation of sovereignty and a road that leads straight to the imposition of a stifling global bureaucracy. This need not be the case, but there exists a cult of expertise (and an array of exclusionist norms and closed processes) regarding trade matters that leaves ordinary citizens utterly uninvolved in the process and unwilling to challenge the economic character of existing trade agreements. The complexity of adding some social and environmental standards or pro-equity and pro-environment pressures to trade treaties would add a degree of complexity, but one that is modest relative to the massive complexity that is already there.

The claim of impotence in the face of competitive pressures is, I think, mostly disingenuous dissembling (and reflects an ethical indifference to environmental and social outcomes). It is at the least a failure of imagination. There are many possible routes to limited global governance that do not establish anything like sovereign global government. It would require an implicit agreement to measure three-dimensional (economic, environmental and social) outcomes and an explicit willingness to experiment with trade rules as if we all lived on a planet where our destinies are increasingly intertwined. Agreements that would lessen the negative social and environmental tendencies of globalization could be added to the trade treaty process. They need not be all that complicated, especially compared to the existing economic terms of today's agreements.

This possibility should be more widely understood. In a world where global economic integration is now the norm, effective citizenship of any kind requires some opportunity for expression at the global scale, and meaningful expression must reside somewhere within the economic heart of the integration process. World environmental summits and environmental treaty processes are not without merit, but there must ultimately be some links between sustainability objectives and the trade treaty process. What are those objectives?

Sustainability relocates green thought from the environment ('out there' in nature) into the core of what it means to have, and to create, more effective human societies and economies. Sustainability analysis evaluates two things: 1) how much prosperity does an economy generate for and from each extraction of materials and energy from nature? And, 2) how much human well-being do societies produce for each increment of prosperity? The idea is very simple and yet despite the enormous costs and risks even to the global economy itself, poor sustainability performance is the norm most of the time in

most places. Sustainability is in effect an alternative measure of societal (and thereby global-scale economic) success. Its advance must be part and parcel of the rules by which the global economy is integrated.

Sustainability focuses first on total material requirement (TMR), the sum total of energy and physical mass extracted from nature. Every extraction carries an environmental price, some are big and some are small, but none is zero. We can reduce that environmental price (per TMR), but it is often easier to reduce the extraction itself. Doing so is also potentially profitable. Make a paper towel from recycled newspapers and extraction is eliminated (almost). Make a sound system lighter with the same quality sound and extractions are reduced. Make it more energy efficient and extractions are reduced. Make it more durable and extractions are reduced. Make a computer with a replaceable chip and extractions are reduced.

On a personal level, walk or cycle to work in good weather and your car will last longer and extractions are reduced. Work at home and sell one car and extractions are reduced. Reduce the average distance traveled by the food you eat from the North American norm in excess of 1000 miles to 500 miles and extractions are reduced (and the food is probably fresher too). A global economy renders it increasingly hard for individual consumers to have any assurance of product safety or of the environmental (and social) impacts of their consumption habits, even with regard to something so basic as food.

Determining the efficiency with which we create human well-being at any given level of prosperity is a little harder because there will inevitably be more than a little debate over the very meaning of well-being. But, most people would agree that longer, healthier lives are a part of it. So too is less crime and more education. The important question is: Can we have prosperity, social justice and environmental protection all at the same time? Does more of one get us more of the other? Under what conditions and circumstances, and in what societies and policy mixes, and (most important within a global economy) what set of trade arrangements is the array of three-dimensional benefits optimized?

What almost everyone green, or even greenish, agrees on is that we could get a lot more prosperity for each extraction of materials and energy from nature. Almost everyone (maybe even including those that extract resources if they got more money for each unit of extraction) would agree is that the 'double efficient' production of well-being from prosperity and prosperity from extractions is a worthwhile objective. The average best guess for what level of improvement is possible over time is about four times more. That would mean that we (the whole world on average) could be four times richer with no more damage to the environment, or as rich with one-fourth the damage. Or, probably best -- given that there are billions of very poor people in the world (and assuming that they would get the gains, or most of them -- a very big assumption) -- twice as rich with half the environmental cost.

The distinction between well-being and prosperity within sustainability analysis allows that richer is not necessarily better, or at least not as good as it might be. It places green thought in the heart of the contemporary debate over globalization. It rejects trickle down economics and the unchallenged celebration GDP growth achieved through the undermining of social programs, human health, environmental protection, and any semblance of social equity. It recognizes that all humans (and with a simultaneous focus on eco-efficiency and environmental protection all of living nature) are a part of a global community. It also changes are time frame from a focus on quarterly balance sheets and electoral cycles to the time frames within which societies as a whole are altered and at which climate changes and energy systems are transformed.

Environmental citizenship in this sense cannot be confined within any one nation or, for that matter, too absorbed with the time horizons of domestic electoral politics. Environmental citizenship is unlike citizenship of any other sort in that the claiming or granting of citizenship in this form does not imply differentiation in terms of rights and duties from any other persons – there are no outsiders on this planet. There are no Athenian slaves and there are no foreigners. That's the good news. The bad news is the nearest thing we global environmental citizens have to a seat of global governance is a growing but unevenly accepted body of only-sometimes-enforced environmental treaties, a widely ignored United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, the WTO and the IMF. At least the latter recently noticed that the reckless fiscal policies of one large nation in particular threatened global economic stability. Perhaps that assertiveness was a beginning of sorts.

Citizenship, in Marshall's sense, is a kind of basic equality and full membership in a community. (p.76) As such, it could be experienced at the global level without a global sovereign state – globally focused citizen initiatives could be taken at the local, national or multilateral level. For example, new trade treaty provisions (or court cases or consumer pressures) might hold international corporations to more stringent social and environmental standards wherever they operate. They could, for example, specify minimum standards for third world employees producing for export, or establish trade-enforced common rules with regard to environmental protection. In effect, the potential for actualizing environmental ethics through global, green citizenship exists to the extent that a globally integrated economy exists. New citizenship opportunities can be created in terms other than direct electoral political participation at the global scale – global governance without global government.

In sum, environmental citizenship can be distinguished from earlier forms of citizenship in four ways: 1) it adds a 4<sup>th</sup> dimension to Marshall's three dimensions of citizenship and places emphasis on the latter two (social and environmental citizenship); 2) while it implicitly accepts that legal and political citizenship will remain indefinitely at the national or sub-national level, it emphasizes the need for global scale social and environmental governance; 3) it is globally inclusive, even to other species and unborn generations – it excludes earth-bound otherness; and 4) it emphasizes duties over rights,

but would logically somehow impose them (though universally) at least in part in proportion to existing economic advantages.<sup>9</sup>

How might these aspects of citizenship be realized? One way to begin is to imagine plausible global scale initiatives that might begin to move the world toward sustainability and then to consider where and how there was any hope at all to realize such initiatives. Plausible is used loosely here and admittedly requires of the reader something of a leap of faith regarding the human future.

### **Getting Beyond Economistic Global Governance**

In *Democracy's Dilemma* I offered a number of what I think are plausible, maybe even possible,\* global scale initiatives, four of which are noted here (a variant of the second possibility is obvious enough to have been advanced by at least one U. S. Democratic candidate for President, to the horror -- noted further below -- of a leading *New York Times* columnist). The four are:

1. ***Peg energy and materials (commodity) prices to the average price of manufactured goods starting with oil. The price of oil should rise at least as fast as the price of manufactured goods and sufficiently fast to at least double the historic rate of dematerialization (GDP per TMR).***
2. ***Develop a global minimum wage system pegging wage levels in export-oriented industries to GDP/capita within each nation or region.***
3. ***Enforce existing and new multilateral environmental and social (labor, human rights) treaties through adjustments to trade access and establish thereby, for example, a near-universal right to unionize, at least within production for export.***
4. ***Begin on an experimental basis a world pension beginning with the oldest citizens of the poorest nations within each global region (excluding OECD countries) with a comparable amount also paid to UNESCO agency operations within those same nations. Fund the system via the Tobin tax or a tax on energy exports.***

The first two of these possible initiatives, or something like them, are important to environmental, social and even economic sustainability – and to, in effect, humanizing global economic integration. The first suggested initiative recognizes the centrality of energy and the importance of the fact that the economically and environmentally best alternatives to oil and natural gas are not yet known. What is known is that any transformation from oil as the core energy source of contemporary society will take a

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<sup>9</sup> Now here is an ethical and political hornet's nest if ever there was one, but I do think that two relevant things could be demonstrated. One, some humans could give up an 'energy share' or even a 'food share' (if it came to that) more easily than others. Two, the rich alone could not give up enough to fully achieve sustainability goals since there are too few of us.

very long time and will affect every aspect of human existence, especially within wealthy nations. It accepts that to even approach sustainability, we must accelerate technical, economic and social change so that we can begin to understand what our post-oil options really are while sufficient fossil fuel reserves exist to see through the transition.

One thing that became apparent following the 1979 OPEC-forced oil price increase (and which was largely forgotten around 1985) was that everything – economic, social and environmental -- depends on the price (and availability) of oil. The good news was that even after an extreme price shock not only did the global economy recover but gasoline consumption in most advanced economies declined absolutely and economic output per unit of energy accelerated (until energy prices fell in 1985).<sup>10</sup> Pegging energy prices to the average price of manufactured goods (or ‘just’ assuring an agreed slow and steady increase in oil prices unless and until something better actually comes along) is essential to encouraging accelerated long-term investment in alternative energy supplies and increased energy efficiency (including expansion of public transit use, recycling and product and infrastructure redesign).

The second suggested initiative might seem radical. It certainly does to *New York Times*’ correspondent Nicholas Kristoff (for whom the widespread economic desperation in places like Cambodia is seemingly sufficient grounds for setting no minimums on wages in third world export industries).<sup>11</sup> Kristoff was responding to global minimum wage proposals advanced by then-candidate Richard Gephardt. However, a global minimum wage could provide some limit to the pace of job transfers and might restrain the downward pressure on industrial wages in wealthy nations. Pegging the limit to GDP/capita, not a part of Gephardt’s proposal, would leave some advantage with the poorest nations relative to less poor nations could be adjusted to avoid rapidly driving all labour-intensive export industries to the lowest wage havens.

The third initiative could substitute for the second or better might serve as a complement, but might also be even more strongly resisted by the economic elites of poorer nations and/or multinational corporations. A pegged global minimum wage (the second possible initiative) could be used to introduce reform in a measured and even-handed way and might have a goal of reducing the gap in industrial wages (between, say, Canada or Germany and Indonesia, Cambodia or China) from something like fifty-fold to something like twenty-or-ten-fold over an extended period of time, much more by change upwards in the latter than downwards in the former.

The effect of such change might lower by a small measure the incentive to relocate and raise the price of imported goods slightly in rich nations. But, even doubling or tripling the wages of those that produce our shoes and clothes and stereos would not affect prices anything like proportionately. It might force some restraint on the value of the endorsement contracts for running shoes or bump the price from \$70 to \$75 per pair, but it might also mean that the person who made those shoes could buy a cell phone

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<sup>10</sup> For further discussion on this point see the editorial and articles in *Alternatives: Canadian Environmental Ideas and Action* 30 (Winter, 2004).

<sup>11</sup> *New York Times*, op ed, January 14, 2004.

designed, if not manufactured, in Finland or afford to go to a Hollywood movie (depressing as that thought might be). Even Henry Ford was more radical than today's 'liberal' columnists when he imagined that his assembly line workers might eventually buy his (and their) products.

Finally here, what of what one might call a world pension? Such a proposal will appear to many economists and policy analysts (not to mention the neo-conservative and middle-of-the-road ideologues that dominate the airwaves of North America) to be unadulterated lunacy, especially in the face of widespread pressures on public pension systems in most wealthy nations (mostly a function of slower birthrates and increased longevity). I suffer no illusion that an awfully large number of people will hear this and suddenly say, "Oh, that's a good idea." Obviously as well, any such initiative would be fraught with problems not the least of which would be determining individual eligibility and actually delivering payment to those eligible. The elderly within the poorest states are likely to be illiterate and many of the poorest states are failed states or dominated by corrupt bureaucracies. And, it would also be argued, such an initiative would in effect be a tax on those nations that trade the most, redistributed within those nations that trade the least and thereby a trade barrier.

But, that is the point. Comprehensive global economic (and transportation and communications) integration requires that there be some way to lift the weakest nations out of desperation. This is true for many reasons, not the least of which is the fact that failed states are terrorist havens. Moreover, new diseases can more easily gain a foothold among the world's poorest and now can move around the world in days not months. As well, environmental protection is all but impossible in the face of poverty and so too is restraint on family size in the face of infant mortality and, increasingly, we all live in one environment. Economic destitution all but guarantees overfishing, overgrazing, the spread of desertification, poaching of endangered species, eating bush meat, and indifference to long-term environmental and social concern of all kinds (including the production of opiates for export). Many or all of these perils can come back to haunt everyone everywhere.

The amounts of money necessary to make a real difference to individuals in the very poorest nations would represent a very small percentage of the value of *any* dimension of global trade and exchange. At the same time an externally-funded pension scheme, however modest, would be a godsend in many African nations where AIDS is decimating the working age population and only the oldest remain available to care for the youngest. Even a modest program – one that involves helping the small number of living elderly in but a small number of nations, a few of the poorest in each poorer region of the world – could make a meaningful difference especially if one realizes that nations like Afghanistan, Burma, Sudan and potentially Palestine might qualify. In brief an initiative of this sort recognizes that we now live in one world and we all bear some responsibility for each other across legal and cultural borders. Idealism can be self-interested without being less idealistic.

The industrial revolution of the 19<sup>th</sup> century transformed the nations of Europe and North America in a positive way (in the end) in part because they were nations or became nations (Germany, Italy) as the industrial revolution advanced, political entities comparable in scale to the productive capacities of their day. Political entities, especially democratic ones, eventually limit the worst excesses of both trade restraint and social maldistribution. They provide essential education opportunities, environmental protection and resource management. Global governance, matching the scale of today's economy, at present *only* seeks to avoid trade restraint and to provide additional incentives to the already wealthy.

This economic form of global governance will not (now or ever) maximize the human benefits that *could* flow from global economic integration.<sup>12</sup> Nor does it, or will it, contend with sustaining economic growth over the long run as industrialization moves beyond the fossil fuels. Human population levels, global integration and simple social justice all require that we become both more efficient at converting wealth into well-being and nature into wealth. Environmental citizens know that the one-dimensional pursuit of prosperity on a global scale is an ethical disaster, achieving too little socially at a higher environmental cost than is necessary. This realization imposes an ethical obligation to participate, to behave as a citizen even in the absence of a so obviously necessary system of effective global governance.

The question is how and where might they (we) see through the citizenly obligation to participate that this necessity imposes?

### **Environmental Citizen Options in a World without Borders**

It is an understatement to say that the possibility that one is a citizen of the world is not all that empowering, even with high-speed internet access, a full belly and money in the bank. Most who see themselves as environmental citizens would accept that their (our) obligations including a duty to engage politically, but it is increasingly less obvious what politically effective options are available. Excluding the internet, so-called alternative media, the world of books and conferences like this one, the means to reach people are dominated by neo-conservative commentators interviewing each other, communications professionals (spin doctors), and advertisers.<sup>13</sup> Only especially slick media are widely visible and slick is very expensive.<sup>14</sup> It is just not obvious how, as they say, self-selected environmental citizens can find a voice. The electronic media cover violent protests extensively and ignore non-violent ones as a matter of course – dissent thereby appears to be largely criminal in character. As well, most public or quasi-public global meeting venues or institutions are predominantly closed to citizen access or open by invitation only.

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<sup>12</sup> For a further discussion of how such benefits might be understood and measures see the discussion in *Democracy's Dilemma*, chapters 4 and 5.

<sup>13</sup> See *Democracy's Dilemma*, chapter 3.

<sup>14</sup> This comment is prompted by the current perilous financial condition of the Canadian environmental journal *Alternatives* that threatens its thirty plus year history and by the general financial challenge to both print and on-line alternative media.

All and all, it is not easy to be a responsible green citizen in a world without borders.<sup>15</sup> How and where, in other words, might environmental citizens seek to achieve policy options like those suggested above, or for that matter *any* effective global scale intervention that moves us towards either environmental sustainability or a semblance of social justice (lessening European and American agricultural subsidies that undermine the ability of poor nations to produce even their own food, for example)? The limits at present would appear to be the achievement of environmental treaties that lessen the likelihood that as a species we will poison ourselves on a global scale. Not that that is not worth doing, but slow-roasting ourselves seems yet to be acceptable even in the face of the summer of 2003 in Europe and the increasing frequency of fires plaguing western North America and Australia.

Ethically, however, it remains unacceptable to surrender in the face of hopeless odds and just go shopping for a self-defense vehicle the size and weight of a tank. As near as I can reason it out, an obligation to act in the face of seemingly impossible odds is not only valid in Hollywood movies. There *really is* always some chance that we can distract the eye while someone tosses the ring. It is not impossible, for example, that the United States might change course and assume a relatively positive leadership role in these matters. This would perhaps be more likely if terrorist incidents were to slow and the IMF (of all organizations) was to stay uppity. Even without such hopeful possibilities, what range of potentially effective participatory options are open to globally oriented green citizens?

There are seven possibilities that I can think of: 1) participation in building global civil society through the NGOs; 2) using the internet and media creatively as, for example, [moveon.org](http://moveon.org) has notably done; 3) acting as citizens within one's nation-state seeking first and foremost trade agreements that incorporate social and environmental standards<sup>16</sup>; 4) getting involved in municipal politics where ordinarily few but developers and municipal unions are truly active; 5) lobbying multinational corporations directly, as (for example) the World Resources Institute is doing so effectively; 6) culture jamming with imagination (unless you are up for tenure consideration); and 7) living small, working less and participating as a citizen more with the time that is gained. No one can do them all, but each does show some promise.

Regarding the first possibility, the array of nongovernmental organizations that comprise global civil society is truly impressive and familiar to all. The challenge is to get the cooperation across a wide array of organizations necessary to advance the cause of global human rights, social and environmental standards, and to place on the agenda the linking of such standards, in some way, to trade agreements. That goal will be a very long time in coming, of course. In the meantime global environmental citizens might continue to seek to further open the proceedings of trade organizations to public scrutiny.

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<sup>15</sup> This closure, and the challenge of even rising to a visible presence on the global agenda, is in part but one of the many costs of terrorism having risen to being a 'normal' form of political engagement. In this way all terrorism serves the ends of those whom the most hope to undermine.

The array of political forces that might find common ground on these objectives is extensive and could include development organizations, human rights organizations, trade unions, environmental groups and social policy advocates within almost every nation.

The second possibility recognizes the potential of the internet, a potential that has at times been exaggerated (by those technophiles that imagine it to be capable of single-handedly taking democracy to a new level). But, the potential is nonetheless real. The internet creates something that has never really existed before – an affordable means of diverse and rapid global scale communications available to individual citizens and not just to corporations, large organizations, governments and the military. Use of the internet could be combined with demands on governments to create or at least permit decentralized, participatory, public access broadcast media. Alternatively, we might also work to reclaim complementary personal face-to-face social capital lost to overwork, long commutes and television.<sup>17</sup>

The third possibility is the obvious: influencing the global by exercising citizen rights at the nation-state level. For change to occur at least some national governments must be committed to advocating global standards – for example, wage levels high enough to perhaps slow the cross-border transfer of work, but not so high as to stop those transfers from richer to poorer nations. There is a potential rich-nation political constituency that is not necessarily protectionist for raising relative wages within poorer nations, as there is for establishing global environmental and social policy standards. There is also a constituency for more open trade negotiations, as there is for work time reductions (especially for optional reductions and flexibility for employees rather than employers in the name of restoring family and community life) and for greater tax fairness. All are an integral part of a sustainability agenda.

*There follows a two paragraph political aside. Readers that already feel a touch harangued are invited to skip it.*

Europe is crucial in this effort because it is where environmental and social policy innovation at present has the highest political credibility. At the same time North America is crucial because this is where the ongoing competitive drag on global environmental and social policy progress must be countered. It is not that there is no policy innovation in North America, even in Texas wind power advances are virtually mandated and proceeding apace. But, on the whole, the current list of backward steps in economic, social and environmental policy in the United States frightens even the IMF. Millions of Americans see what is happening environmentally, but many more millions focus primarily on tax cuts and/or standing up to perceived global enemies in a kind of retro cold war re-run.

My greatest political fear at the moment is that, derives from Paul Krugman's suspicions regarding U. S. deficits being the first shoe: the other shoe will fall after a

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<sup>17</sup> See Robert Putnam's discussion on the relationship between social capital, the internet and television in *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000).

media-driven Republican re-election when what remains of the U. S. social safety net is axed in the name of a new-found interest in fiscal prudence and, of course, the permanent and all-encompassing war on terror. Such a policy leap would in turn impose further downwards pressure on taxation and social policy in every other advanced nation in the world. In sum, it is just very hard to imagine a viable environmentally and socially positive politics at the global scale unless and until national domestic politics in the United States looks less like the public sector equivalent of Enron. (*Here ends the partisan screed.*)

A fourth possibility for environmental citizen participation is municipal politics. The result of the 2003 San Francisco municipal election was nothing less than stunning, for me the first glimmer of grassroots hope in U.S. politics in at least a decade. The San Francisco result came at the same time that a referendum in my more obscure city (Peterborough, Ontario) to build a long-planned new highway was unexpectedly rejected in a voter referendum at the same time that the city of Toronto elected a mayor over two strong opponents primarily because he flatly refused on environmental grounds to build a bridge that would increase the use of the downtown (island) airport. He even got away with advocating tolls on highways to fund public transit. I think that new municipal opportunities exist now in part because people care a great deal about their communities, but also in particular because television and slick public relations and polling are less dominant at the municipal level (and therefore citizen participation and face to face politics has a window of opportunity that could create its own momentum).

The fifth possibility (the direct lobbying of corporations) will strike some as an implausible quest, but I increasingly think that this is a real possibility (within obvious limits). The World Resources Institute has made a convincing business case against the emphasis on large cars and SUVs typical of North American automakers (suggesting that a too easy lobbying environment in North America has provided a competitive advantage to Toyota, Honda and other firms in the not-so-long run).<sup>18</sup> As well, many leading business schools are now adding sustainability to their curriculum.<sup>19</sup> There are many other possible openings into this world, including: acting through pension funds or tightly defined ethical investments; encouraging demands from high quality employees for greater personnel flexibility (today's business career models were after all designed by white men with compliant wives somewhere back around 1950); or arguing effectively that creativity regarding energy and materials efficiency is a route to greater long-term competitiveness.

The sixth possibility is culture jamming broadly defined. The possibilities here are endless. My particular favorites are brilliant chefs that favor locally grown organic ingredients purchased directly from producers themselves and say so openly and often.

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<sup>18</sup> Duncan Austin, Niki Rosinski, Amanda Sauer and Colin LeDuc, *Changing Drivers: The Impact of Climate Change on Competitiveness and Value Creation in the Automobile Industry* (Washington, D.C.: World Resources Institute, 2002).

<sup>19</sup> Meghan Chapple, Nicholas Powers, and Rich Bunch, *Beyond Grey Pinstripes 2003: Preparing MBAs for Social and Environmental Stewardship* (Washington, D.C.: World Resources Institute, 2002).

They are everywhere and very much in favor.<sup>20</sup> They are, I suspect, even more effective culture jammers than Adbusters. So too are Doonesbury, Willie Nelson's song about Iraq, the No Store in London, England, or a number of very popular writers in such genres as murder mysteries and legal thrillers.<sup>21</sup> Changing people's mindsets, breaking them away from the endless consumerist hype can be achieved best with humor and within every realm of artistic expression. Spray painting or setting fire to gross examples of suburban sprawl is perhaps insufficiently subtle to have an enduring appeal.

Finally, the seventh option is my current personal favorite, one I now live and would be happy to discuss with anyone for whom it seems an interesting possibility. For some years now I have managed to live well below my means (very easy to do in a small town on a high-end academic salary and obviously not an option for everyone). My children thought that I was just stingy and boring, but I felt that I was living rather well, but in a very small house, traveling and consuming much less than I had at times in the past. The result is that I no longer work for a living. As I see it, more time and less stress are my reward for environmental virtue. Free time is an environmental citizen's due, a right granted by gaia to offset all those non-consumerist environmentalist duties, and, as a bonus, a citizenly opportunity. I highly recommend it.

These are some of the spaces wherein effective citizen engagement remains possible even in the face of global economic integration. I would not presume to say anything more about the content of that engagement (other than my earlier mention of the four global-scale policy options by way of example). However, I think that it is also the case that doing academic work is oft-times underestimated as a way to (slowly) change perceptions and perspectives on a global scale.

Generally, we have not yet fully appreciated how distinctive the interdisciplinary (university-based) study of environment might be. It is one of the few subjects of inquiry within universities that integrates understandings and perspectives from the natural sciences with those of the humanities and social sciences. More than that, sustainability analysis is one of the few ethically rich, scientifically grounded worldviews with the potential to challenge the dominant ethos of the global economy: economism (which assumes that short-term GDP growth, regardless of distributive outcomes or environmental effects, is the best of all possible worlds).

### **Conclusion: Ethics, Science and Politics**

The new science of sustainability analysis has already had a small effect on the policy process.<sup>22</sup> Many government statistical agencies are modifying the data they gather to enable

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<sup>20</sup> The pioneer in all this is of course San Francisco's Alice Waters, but there are now literally hundreds of others across North America as well as Europe's slow food movement. For a North American list see *Organic Style* magazine, January/February, 2004 issue, pp. 93-107.

<sup>21</sup> As two examples see #1 bestseller John Grisham, *The King of Torts* (New York: Dell, 2003), where one of many villains is a sprawl oriented developer and Sarah Paretsky *Hard Time* (New York: Dell, 1999), where the author is scathing in her characterization of suburbs and oversize SUVs.

<sup>22</sup> These concluding paragraphs are adapted and updated from Robert Paehlke, "Environmental Politics, Sustainability, and Social Science," *Environmental Politics* 10 (Winter, 2001), pp. 1-22.

sustainability research. Even some industry sectors are paying close attention to this work and its implications. It is not common that a development within academic research other than in the sciences and engineering or marketing and management has any effect on government and industry, but the evolution of environmental studies and science just may be different. Environmental studies and science, in tandem (though sometimes at odds) with the environmental movement, is slowly changing our understanding of not only of nature and society, but also of ethics, production and governance. In this it has had an effect on virtually every academic discipline, from the hard sciences and engineering through the social sciences to the humanities. Many have seen the creation of a sub-discipline oriented to environmental concerns.

Sustainability analysis<sup>23</sup> has the potential to bring together much of this disparate work, to combine it with research relevant to the achievement of social justice, and to do so simultaneously in value-oriented (ethical) and empirical terms. The array of research questions that sustainability analysis can address might include scientific questions such as: 1) Overall, is the environment improving or in decline? 2) How can production processes and product designs improve the efficiency of output in terms of material flows and energy use? 3) Which ecosystems are most threatened and how might they be protected at minimal social and economic cost? 4) Are the poor or the rich gaining or losing ground compared to everyone else? The very inclusion of this latter question is ethically charged. But even more ethically charged are questions such as: 1) What is societal well-being and how might it be measured and compared? 2) Which array of policies might achieve well-being most effectively? 3) Within which nations are the poor (or the majority of citizens) getting a significant share of prosperity?

Through integrative inquiry such as sustainability analysis, environmental studies and science in combination can provide alternative research objectives and alternative integrating concepts. Alternative, that is, to the natural and strictly empirical social sciences (or those pretending to be empirical such as economics). What is alternative about this approach is that it openly draws ethical considerations into the world of scientific and social scientific research. It brings value issues to open and collective consideration and that utilizes more effectively the full array of skills and perspectives that exist within university research communities. One might even hope that influence would then flow from university to society to at least partly offset the increasingly heavy flow of economic influences into contemporary university life (through for example that public funding be matched by private contributions that will only rarely flow *without* commercial potential or *with* a socially critical perspective).

At the same time, an emphasis on sustainability is politically different from earlier emphases in both environmental science and environmental advocacy that emphasized pollution and wilderness protection. It is potentially helpful to economic success in the long term, though a definite challenge to conventional commercial wisdom in the short term. While pollution abatement sometimes produces net savings for firms, sustainability

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<sup>23</sup> Sustainability analysis has also been called 3D analysis: recall here that it considers two questions – how efficiently does society produce wealth from nature (and resources) and how efficiently does it create social well-being (measured in terms shared values such as health, the absence of crime, social cohesion, literacy, educational achievement, and even subjective measures like happiness). Obviously, the definition of social well-being is highly charged in ethical, not to mention political, terms.

(conceived as eco-efficient production) can reduce costs to firms, especially manufacturing firms, in most cases. Thus, within this dimension of sustainability, environmental politics could be for the most part cooperative in character.

The real ethical challenge to society inherent in sustainability analysis involves the challenges it may pose to consumer society, rather than 'just' to capitalist behavior. Beyond eco-efficiency, on which almost everyone can potentially agree, sustainability implies that we should consume both differently *and less*. That is the real political challenge of sustainability, one that calls into question aspects of contemporary life that environmental politics has not recently challenged.

A global political contest between neo-liberal 'extreme capitalism' and a politics of sustainability would seem an uneven match to say the least. But, one of the great strengths of sustainability advocacy lies in its inherent political complexity. It is irretrievable politically middle-of-the-road. An emphasis on eco-efficiency would see many corporate interests on side with environmental advocates. Indeed, eco-efficiency innovations require both capitalism's dynamism and some selective state intervention. One can imagine that there is a reasonable hope of achieving majority support for such a view in many circumstances and locales, especially in the face of neo-liberalism's chronic ideological inflexibility and the failure to deliver improved lives to any but a minority in many nations. Both sustainability analysis bears this out. So, to some extent does the current U.S. presidential race.

The challenge to academic ethicists today is to find ways to link our work to the findings of science and social science and to the setting not just our own research agendas, but those of (some) researchers within most if not all disciplines. We need to motivate them consider the societal and even historic implications of their findings, or to rethink the questions that they are asking (or the willingness of some of their number to attempt to integrate the findings of many analysts in their and other fields) if their findings can offer nothing at that level. We need to understand their findings sufficiently to consider the ethical and political implications and to communicate our considered views both among ourselves and ultimately to society at large.