

## Democracy and Ecological Sustainability

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Our presentation aims to address two primary questions. First, is the transition from an ecologically unsustainable global society to an ecologically sustainable one compatible with democratic politics? Second, if so, what form or model of democratic politics would be most appropriate to such a transition?

In his classic work *Green Political Thought* (Routledge 2000, 3rd edition), Andrew Dobson notes that accusations of authoritarianism are never far from the surface where green social change is concerned. Such accusations, he contends, are not entirely unjustified, for at least two reasons: first, because of the strong catastrophic tendency in green politics suggesting that the environmental crisis is so dire that no one could reasonably be expected to accept voluntarily the kinds of measures that would be needed to deal with it; and second, because the political-ecological belief that there is a right way to live the green Good Life is incompatible with the value pluralism normally associated with (liberal) democracy. In short, the sort of green politics necessary for the transition to an ecologically sustainable global society may well conflict with democratic values and procedures because of the imperative nature of such a politics. In the words of William Ophuls, writing in the early 1970s, 'If scarcity is not dead, if it is in fact with us in a seemingly much more intense form than ever before in human history, how can we avoid reaching the conclusion that Leviathan is inevitable? Given current levels of population and technology, I do not believe that we can.' (Ophuls, 1973)

In this presentation we both investigate the alleged tension between green and democratic politics, and explore possible ways of relieving it. Our primary argument is that while certain forms of green politics may well be incompatible with certain models of democracy, green democracy is not necessarily a contradiction in terms, and in fact may be our best hope for navigating the fraught transition to an ecologically sustainable society.