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## **ON COMPROMISE IN RADICAL ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVISM**

### **O kompromisie w radykalnym aktywizmie środowiskowym**

Słowa kluczowe: sprawiedliwość ekologiczna, akcja środowiskowa, radykalny aktywizm, logika protestu, kompromis

Key words: ecological justice, environmental action, radical activism, logic of protest, compromise

#### Streszczenie

Artykuł rozpatruje strategie i taktyki stosowane przez radykalnych aktywistów środowiskowych. Według autorów, motto radykalistów „Bez kompromisu” nie jest ani najskuteczniejszą, ani akceptowalną strategią działania. Bezpośrednia akcja

#### Abstract

This article examines the strategies and tactics of radical environmental activism. The authors argue that the motto “No Compromise” is neither an effective nor acceptable strategy for environmental activism. Direct action

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<sup>1</sup> The initial ideas included in this article were presented at the annual conference of the International Society for Environmental Ethics in Norwich, UK, in 2012. We are grateful for the insightful comments of the reviewers. We also thank Emmanuel Picavet for valuable ideas that helped us to reshape this manuscript. Małgorzata Dereniowska extends her thanks to the Centre for Ethics and Poverty Research (CEPR), University of Salzburg (Austria) for the support in finalizing this project during her research stay at CEPR.

może być przeprowadzona w sposób, który umożliwi osiągnięcie kompromisu oraz budowanie koalicji – jako niezbędnych elementów długofalowego sukcesu. Jak pokazują wyniki analizy, pomimo bezkompromisowej retoryki, metody niektórych grup (Earth First!) wpisują się w tradycje demokratycznych ruchów protestacyjnych. Autorzy omawiają warunki, w jakich kompromis może odgrywać pozytywną rolę w procesie wdrażania zmian pro-środowiskowych w duchu sprawiedliwości ekologicznej.

can be carried out in a way that allows effective compromise and coalition building – the essential elements of most successful movements. The analysis shows that despite their strong rhetoric, the methods of some radical groups (e.g., Earth First!) can be related to democratic protest movements. The authors discuss the conditions in which compromise can play a positive role in moving a pro-environmental agenda forward in the spirit of ecological justice.

## Introduction

Environmentalism is an area encompassing both academic studies and social movements. As such, it is concerned with the relationship between humans and the environment as a matter of justice and ethics. While sharing the same goal – i.e., to make the human-nature relationship more just and ethical – multiple stances give environmentalism many faces. Diverse approaches to environmental ethics (e.g., anthropocentrism, biocentrism, and ecocentrism) and social movements (e.g., animal rights activism, environmental justice, and radical environmental activism) advocate various ethical constructions of the human relationship with the environment. Positions range from human-centered concerns regarding environmental conditions for human interests, to nature-centered biocentric and ecocentric approaches that expand the moral community to include nonhuman nature, thereby linking justice with environmental protection and animal rights. David Schlosberg proposes to bring them together under the heading of “ecological justice” (2014), which points to the continuity between the social and natural environments as being a matter of justice.

Peter Wenz was an early promoter of an integrative account of social-environmental justice, claiming that “without environmental protection, our physical environment could become uninhabitable. Without justice, our social environment could become equally hostile” (Wenz 1988: 2). Yet the oppositions within the broad ecological justice movement are today still reflected in the heterogeneous strategies, tactics, and styles of advocacy. Environmental justice activists focus on procedural and distributive justice for oppressed communities suffering from environmental burdens; radical environmentalists are often

engaged in projects for nature itself, objecting to human interests being taken to be the only important considerations in most schemes of decision making. Animal rights activists work for legal recognition of our moral obligations to animals – a position that Mark Sagoff once claimed, in “Animal Liberation and Environmental Ethics: Bad Marriage, Quick Divorce” (1984), cannot be made consistent with ecocentric environmental ethics.

Why, someone might ask, can these different concerns not be made to overlap constructively? After all, movements with divergent aims can frequently be brought together in the pursuit of shared goals. The often seemingly contradicting concerns of social and environmental justice pose difficulties to attempts at a unified theory and the practice of ecological justice. The issue at hand is the possibility of constructive cooperation and compromise among so many diverse considerations at work in environmental action. What would be required of the practice of ecological justice in the face of such diversity and difference – more specifically, in radical environmental activism?

This article systematizes the positions of a segment of radical environmental activists and their detractors as they relate to direct action. Our aim is to investigate whether radical environmentalism can be a resource for cooperative democratic action. Our main points of reference are Earth Liberation Front (ELF) and Earth First! (EF!), especially as they operated during the height of environmental activism (the 1980s and 90s). The contrast between these groups illustrates (1) some of the diversity of attitudes, tactics, and approaches grouped under the “radical” activism label<sup>2</sup> as they relate to participatory and direct democracy models, which potentially supports some versions of civil disobedience but likely undercuts others, and (2) the potential, limits, and conditions for political compromise in direct environmental action. We also employ discourse analysis in relation to some activists engaged in the Animal Liberation Front (ALF) in order to clarify the meaning of moral integrity and its relationship with compromise and efficacy in environmental politics.

The remainder of the article is organized as follows. First, we briefly discuss the general concerns and strategies involved in ecological justice. We build on David Schlosberg’s analysis of participation practiced by environmental justice movements (Schlosberg 2002; 2009),

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<sup>2</sup> The actual diversity of radical environmental activism is much more significant than what we can present within the scope of this paper. Rik Scarce lays out a useful categorization of radical environmental activism in his book *Eco-Warriors: Understanding the Radical Environmental Movement* (2006). See also Nagtzaam (2017) and Liddick (2006).

expanding it to include more radical forms of political engagement. While controversial in the use of direct illegal action, radical environmental movements' considerable efficacy in bringing attention to environmental concerns deserves critical attention. We next proceed to the analysis of environmental direct action as practiced in environmental mainstream and radical movements. We address the question of to what extent, and which types of, radical environmental activism can be seen to fit with the logic of protest as accepted in constitutional democracies. Our argument is that there are certain forms of direct action that can be seen as expressions of democratic participation in remedying specific cases of injustice, even if such direct forms of democracy violate established forms and procedures of democratic interactions. To illustrate this point, we analyze the discourse and tactics employed by the radical group Earth Liberation Front (ELF) and Earth First! (EF!). The two contrasting examples allow us to show how different types of illegal actions (e.g., "monkeywrenching" and eco-sabotage) relate to civil disobedience. Our methodology consists of a content analysis of popular publications by representative radical environmental activists. We employ a hermeneutical reading of these around the questions of strategies and tactics, and engage with academic studies of radical environmental activism (e.g., Liddick 2006 and Nagztam 2017).

In the third part, we build on Martin Benjamin's claim that compromise need not always amount to moral capitulation but can be integrity preserving. It can, we believe, be an effective means of moving forward a pro-environmental agenda. Key to our argument is the distinction and interrelation between political and moral compromise; for example, moral commitments can include democratic ideals and an awareness of irreducible difference. Furthermore, drawing constructive potential from pluralism may lead us to engage in morally acceptable compromise despite moral differences.

The fourth section discusses the conditions that determine effective use of compromise. We argue that seeing oneself as a part of a larger community in which decisions must be made is essential to a full appreciation and effective use of compromise. To support our line of reasoning towards a compromise-encompassing approach to environmental direct action, we employ two distinctions: first, between views that call for action and the attitudes employed in an action's execution, and second, between the moral and political community. These distinctions help us to articulate the potential for direct action as constructively supportive of environmentally mindful change.

## **Environmental concerns and political attitudes**

Environmentalism has many faces, bringing together social activism, policy making, and academic scholarship under one heading. Its common denominator has been efforts to change value systems and institutional settings in order to achieve more just environmental conditions and, ultimately, environmental well-being. These issues involve questions of ethical conduct, efficacy, participation in decision making, and increased representation (e.g., for those who cannot speak for themselves). Several competing approaches have been developed to answer questions of, for example, who has moral standing (the quality of being a necessary object of moral agents' consideration) and what is the scope of the moral community, and of the efficacy of environmental advocacy and its strategies (including the role of philosophical arguments and practical strategies to pursue or enforce objectives).

For environmental philosophers, a key issue has been the moral status and value of things ranging from plants, to animals, to species, to ecosystems, and even to the biosphere as a whole. Regardless of where one stands on this matter, a common thread has been the willingness to challenge traditional models of the human-nature relationship. Laws against animal cruelty reflect general public acceptance of the notion that humans are not the only beings who have value, extending, in a fairly straightforward way, moral standing from the paradigmatic case of human beings to other intelligent, sentient, conscious beings. Even here, though, there is disagreement on the proper grounds of extension (e.g., sentience or something more or less restrictive, such as moral agency or simply being alive) and how to then weigh competing interests or Kantian-like duties in cases of conflict.

While working for the betterment of environmental conditions, environmental justice movements (EJMs) are primarily social justice movements. That is, the environmental equity that EJMs seek is for people; it is about human beings' environmental rights (e.g., their access to information and living in a clean environment), participation in decision making processes, and equalizing structural inequalities that enable uneven distribution of environmental burdens and benefits. EJMs are anthropocentrically oriented insofar as humans are the subjects of justice.

Environmental justice discourse, per se, with its focus on the human, is often not foremost on the minds of activists intent on protecting nature itself; such was the case with Earth First! (though not with Earth Liberation Front). Likewise, mainstream environmental groups have been traditionally often dedicated to a narrow range of concerns.

The Wilderness Society, for example, has long worked, as its name implies, primarily on the issue of wilderness preservation. Other mainstream environmental groups, such as the Sierra Club, have been much more diverse in terms of issues they pursue, focusing neither exclusively on human nor non-human concerns. Most mainstream groups seek consensus solutions to environmental protection, and advocate policy as both activists and lobbyists working within standard political institutions. Radical environmentalism, on the other hand, emphasizes the necessity for deeper institutional, social, and economic change that more “radically” challenges the status quo of species chauvinism and anthropocentrism.<sup>3</sup>

One of the reasons for the existing gap in the composition, concerns, and objectives of environmental movements (including between environmental justice movements and radical environmentalism) is linked with the differences in the socio-economic status of their members. For example, questions of animal rights or wilderness are too distant from the direct concerns of many working poor and racially marginalized, whose primary concerns are about their own dignified living and survival conditions (Liddick 2006: 83–84). Environmental justice activists are similarly, and quite understandably, constrained by the enormity of the problems they are working to alleviate; there is little time or energy to devote to issues of environmental welfare as it relates to the non-human world.

Davis Schlosberg’s investigation of environmental justice movements (2002; 2009) provides a useful lens for analysis of various facets of environmentalism at the intersection of research, policy, and social action. He considers the pluralism of mainstream and grassroots environmental justice movements as theoretically adequate (reflecting the broad scope of justice considerations in environmental contexts) and practically useful (as a facilitator for strengthening environmental causes, coalition building, networking, etc.). In particular, two points are important for us in Schlosberg’s analysis. The first refers to the interpretation of the movement’s aspiration: “environmental justice groups, rather than seeking particular and incremental policy changes, are insisting on a fundamental change in the process of environmental and economic decisions that affect their communities” (Schlos-

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<sup>3</sup> According to Klaus Bosselmann, an environmental law scholar from New Zealand, the question of philosophical commitments to anthropocentrism or biocentrism is of central importance in safeguarding a sustainable future; the anthropocentrism vs. ecocentrism split determines our understanding of the purposes of governance systems, and influences the concepts of environmental law (Bosselman 2008).

berg 2002: 163). Environmental justice movements aim to build a general, participatory approach to justice and public decision making (not just regarding environment and health) that motivates institutional change processes. The second point pertains to the fundamental role of participation of those who have been exterior to decision making processes in pursuing the goals of the movement.

Schlosberg (2009) distinguishes three general types of participatory practice in environmental justice movements. The first refers to the demands for adequate and full information about the risks and problems that affect communities as one of the conditions for informed consent. Second, environmental justice movements demand inclusion in policy-making and decision making processes. Here, the emphasis is on the extension of public discourse to all who are affected by a decision (Schlosberg 2002: 163). Although the scope of inclusion and roles in decision making can vary among different movements – ranging from demands for consultation to shared decision authority as equal partners – nevertheless procedural inclusion, community empowerment, and public deliberation remain at the heart of environmental justice claims (Schlosberg 2009: 69). The third type of participatory practice refers to community-based, participatory action research, which is considered an important element of procedural justice (Ibidem: 70).

Participation as an essential aspect of environmental justice has importance for environmentalism at large: active participation and the enabling procedural component of justice are conditions of positive change. In this context, an analysis of discourse and strategies of various activist movements raises the question of beliefs and attitudes towards justice concerns.

Indeed, moderate views are not necessarily the same thing as moderate attitudes in political exchange (Malnes 1992). For some radical environmentalists, direct action is a tool for defending beings and entities that do not have the capacity to represent themselves or to advocate for their own interests. The concerns about extending the community of justice to include non-human patients as claim-holders, in face of substantial mistreatment and ecological injustice, are not unreasonable in themselves. Well-grounded and reasoned arguments for the moral considerability of non-human beings and nature have been abundantly and continuously made in the field of environmental philosophy for several decades, backed by animal behavioral and evolutionary sciences that reveal that the differences between human and non-human beings are more of degree than kind. Regardless of the controversies these concerns raise by virtue of being inconsistent with dominant socio-cultural beliefs about the

supremacy of human beings, the idea that animals and nature deserve moral standing does have argumentative legitimacy. A different, albeit related, issue pertains to the justification of the choice of strategies and attitudes for putting nature-minded views into practice. This point makes radical activists' actions and goals distinct from mainstream environmental activism. The mutual link between moral-political views and attitudes involves complex relationships between thought and action in terms of moral integrity.

Moral and political philosophies can impact how people act (Malnes 2006) by providing motivational resources to act in environmentally-friendly ways. The arguments and motives range from instrumental and human-centered to selfless care for nature itself. But these motivations can also play out in multiple ways in political contexts, depending in part on how much weight is placed on the costs and benefits of action in a broader scheme. Obtaining public support for an environmental agenda may require sacrificing some short-term goals, such as the well-being of particular individual animals or the condition of concrete ecosystems until the support is granted. Conversely, protecting natural sites or individual animals now may come at significant economic cost or loss of societal support. The interconnection between the short and long-term goals can also be differently conceived and justified within the communities of action. For this reason, questions of integrity between thought and action and its political impact are linked with the possibilities of direct and participatory democracy converging in the mutual seeking of positive environmental change.

In this context, some distinctions that clarify the potential for compromise to facilitate positive social change include (as described in the next section) that between using moral suasion (a favored tactic of EF!) and challenging basic premises of Western political, social, and economic systems (as ELF did). Some tactics will fall too far outside of the logic of protest in the democratic context to be morally or politically legitimate, and some will put social and ecological justice concerns in opposition to various degrees.

## **Environmental direct action strategies and the logic of protest**

Mainstream environmentalism – against which radical groups form their identity – works almost exclusively within the legal system, with few examples of even civil disobedience. The Nature Conservancy, for example, works closely with land owners to establish conservation easements and buys ecologically important acreage to either create private preserves or transfer it to the government for inclusion in adjacent parks or refuges. The Sierra Club has long been engaged in public education projects, lobbying efforts, and judicial maneuvers, as has the National Audubon Society, Wilderness Society, and the myriad of other local, national, and even international organizations. Many of these groups trace their roots to the early or middle part of the last century and cite as founders or important members the likes of John Muir, Aldo Leopold, Sigurd Olson, and Ansel Adams. In the United States, the shift to more aggressive activist tactics took place largely in the 1980s as some environmentalists – many of whom worked for the mainstream groups – became disillusioned with the degree of compromise, the lack of progress, and the professionalization of the large organizations. The solution, to their minds, was not only to demand more and compromise less, but to push harder for their goals through aggressive forms of activism. Thus Earth First!, for example, quickly established itself in the early 1980s as a direct action group willing to engage not only in standard forms of civil disobedience such as sit-ins and road blocks, but also mild forms of sabotage.

Many of these actions are not only illegal (as is civil disobedience) but involve property destruction, ranging from pulling survey stakes to putting sand in bulldozer cranks to tree-spiking. As these activists are quick to point out, both civil disobedience and limited sabotage – referred to, following Edward Abbey (2006 [1975]), as “monkeywrenching” – have a long, and at times even honorable, history in protest movements around the world.<sup>4</sup> Debates about such tactics continue, though it has been the move by some to actions well beyond these in terms of destructive force – such as the use of arson – that causes many who have supported, or at least not condemned, the more mild monkeywrenching to rethink the legitimacy and efficacy of certain forms of environmental

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<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Dave Foreman’s attempt to liken environmental monkeywrenching with the Boston Tea Party and Underground Railroad in his *Confessions of an Eco-Warrior* (1991: 119). Craig Rosebraugh compares ELF’s actions favorably to the Boston Tea Party also in *Burning Rage of a Dying Planet* (2004: 237).

activism. This is especially so when Craig Rosebraugh – a former liaison between ELF and the media – is on record claiming that the choice between civil disobedience and eco-sabotage, or between mild and severe eco-sabotage, is one of tactics rather than theory or morality. The morally weighty decision for him is between choosing to cause positive social change or not – i.e., by using the “necessary” tactics or those that have proven, to his mind, unsuccessful (Rosebraugh 2004: 249–252). But once we accept this it seems we have at least one foot on the proverbial slippery slope towards more and more dangerous and socially alienating actions. Rosebraugh not only approves of “torching gas-guzzling SUVs at a retail auto dealership,” but asks rhetorically, and hopefully, “When was the last time a Ford plant that actually manufactures Excursions was blown up or torched to the ground?” (Ibidem: 253).

Before going further, it is worth being clearer on how Earth First!’s monkeywrenching and ELF’s more serious eco-sabotage both differ from civil disobedience. First, civil disobedience, as it has largely been understood since the civil rights and anti-war movements of the 1950’s through 70’s (though it has much older roots), is a matter of righting unjust laws or policies through non-violent, though illegal, action. Frequently its well-functioning is predicated on the idea that through one’s demonstration of commitment to both righting the perceived wrong and to law in general – by both non-violently breaking a specific law and accepting the resulting punishment – one appeals to the public’s sense of morality. The protester and citizen see each other as sharing fundamental moral and political commitments even if they disagree on the specific issue or on whether a particular protest is aimed in the right direction. Monkeywrenching goes further in that it introduces property destruction as a means to make completion of an unwanted action, such as logging old growth redwoods, more difficult (Foreman 1993). Unlike civil disobedience, it need not rely on media exposure explicitly, though it is usually undertaken in conjunction with both legal and illegal protest that depends on public awareness. In fact, the monkeywrenching itself is often kept quiet by both the activists and industry – the former to avoid bad publicity (Foreman 1991: 164) and the latter to dodge further public scrutiny. Monkeywrenchers also tend to act subversively in that they do not volunteer for arrest.<sup>5</sup> For lack of a more convenient term, we will call the use of tactics such as arson simply “more serious eco-sabotage,” not-

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<sup>5</sup> The rationale here is quite simple: offering oneself up for arrest in cases of property destruction, as opposed to civilly disobedient acts such as road blockades, is too costly in terms of time and money to those involved.

ing at this point merely their more destructive and potentially dangerous character than that involved in mere monkeywrenching. The question becomes, then, whether the more serious forms are simply more destructive and dangerous or whether they can be marked off as different in a way that goes beyond subjective feelings of what one is comfortable with, and ultimately whether one of these (or neither) leaves room for the cooperation and compromise that almost inevitably is necessary for lasting and positive change in a pluralistic democracy.

For Earth First! the various civilly disobedient and monkeywrenching tactics are part of a larger strategy that emphasizes slowing down particular cases of, for example, logging in order to buy time for the mutually reinforcing goals of legal options (judicial and legislative), and public awareness and support, to succeed. Sometime the legal maneuvers are carried out by radical environmentalists simultaneously with these other tactics, but more often it is the mainstream groups that pursue the court and lobbying efforts.<sup>6</sup> In fact, there is evidence that groups like Earth First! communicate with, and even (loosely and unofficially) coordinate with, mainstream groups. This seems not to be the strategy of ELF (insofar as we can generalize from the group's communiqués and from spokespersons such as Rosebraugh and Leslie Pickering). Although they sometimes say that they both seek increased public support and hope for successful legal actions, ELF activists' more often stated aim is simply to make particular deeds too economically costly for the agent involved to continue. There is admittedly some overlap here, with Earth First!ers occasionally citing – gleefully – the cost to logging enterprises of damaged equipment. For instance, key Earth First! organizer Judi Bari, tongue in cheek, claims that in 1990, “\$1.5 million worth of fellerbunchers . . . have self-destructed in the woods of Mendo[cino] County” (Bari 1994: 81). But despite this, the two groups' respective overall strategies – and their willingness to then use particular tactics – differ significantly.

When one's strategy is to stop a housing project or logging contract by making it too costly, failure to accomplish this might naturally lead to calls for more and bigger attacks. And that is exactly what Rosebraugh has called for upon admitting that ELF actions have not yet succeeded. He argues that since insurance covers the costs of a single

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<sup>6</sup> A useful example of this division of labor is found in the long-waged conflict between environmentalists and Pacific Lumber in the 1990s. While Earth First!ers protested on the ground, a little known, but quite mainstream group called The Environmental Protection Information Center engaged Pacific Lumber in court. See Patrick Beach's *A Good Forest for Dying* (2009: 185).

arson event, long term success demands more frequent and expensive actions that would cause insurance premiums to dramatically increase, perhaps to such an extent that certain enterprises are no longer insurable (Rosebraugh 2004: 70; 252).

Although no one has yet to be seriously hurt or killed as a result of ELF actions, the likelihood surely increases proportionally with the frequency and size of attacks – something obvious to critics and the lay public alike. But it is precisely Rosebraugh and Pickering’s commitment to the strategy of increasing costs that leads them – but not Earth First!ers – to the belief that this regrettable result would be acceptable (Pickering 2007: 61). Rosebraugh goes so far as to call for “ELF [to] transform itself from a reformist group into a revolutionary one,” saying that since “the US political system itself is right at the top of that injustice food chain,” it should be targeted. Even if some of this is only posturing, the rhetoric is dangerous, as there is always the possibility that some individuals will escalate tactics beyond those so far used (especially given ELF’s lack of official or unified organizational and communication structure). Already in 2002, an ELF communiqué claiming responsibility for the torching of a Forest Service research laboratory in Pennsylvania threatened that “where it is necessary, we will no longer hesitate to pick up the gun to . . . provide the needed protection for our planet that decades of legal battles, pleading, protest, and economic sabotage have failed so drastically to achieve” (MacDonald 2005: 22–23). Rosebraugh spoke favorably about the escalated intensity, saying that although such violence would go against the stated ELF principle that no life should be harmed, activists could move on to form new identity groups that would not be so limited (Rosebraugh 2004: 253, 263–65).

Two points of clarification are in order. First, Earth First!ers, such as Bari, have sometimes also used the rhetoric of “revolution” (see Scarce 2006: 94). However, Bari fought hard within Earth First! to minimize, or even eliminate the use of monkeywrenching, which suggests that her notion of revolution refers to the degree of social and political change sought, where the methods used would be more conventional protest and civil disobedience. In addition to concerns about public perception, she worried that monkeywrenching done in proximity to people engaged in civil disobedience would place the latter activists in greater danger of retaliation by angry loggers, and since the overall strategy is to win the hearts and minds (including those of timber workers) and win the judicial and legislative battles, civil disobedience was preferred (Bari 1994: 284–285).

Second, Earth First! also seeks to increase the economic costs of ecologically destructive behavior. But in the context of the larger strategy, this has limits. It should be noted in passing that even legal tactics – such as boycotts – are often done to increase monetary costs. In such cases, it is used as a tactic insofar as it might advance the strategy of moral suasion or, in the case of monkeywrenching, of slowing down destructive practices long enough that legal means and other actions aimed to morally persuade can catch up. All of this depends upon growing public support, which makes it irrational to push property destruction further than, and maybe not even up to, monkeywrenching.

An example well illustrates how Earth First!'s strategy limits their use of property destruction. Especially in the early days of the group, tree-spiking was praised as a safe way to slow down, or even stop, old-growth harvests. However, in 1987 mill worker George Alexander was nearly killed when his band-saw blade shattered upon hitting a metal spike. It seemed clear that the spiking was not an Earth First! action since it was not announced to the logging company or the Forest Service and the trees were apparently spiked after being felled – after all, the point of spiking is to prevent trees from being cut in the first place. Nonetheless, the danger of spiking made headlines and led to cries by opponents that Earth First! was a dangerous group – even terrorists – who cared more for trees than for loggers. This led leaders of the Northern California chapter of Earth First! to renounce the tactic (Bari 1994: 264) and to even make participants in Earth First! campaigns sign a pledge that they would cease such action. The larger strategy of Earth First! is dependent upon public opinion. In fact, it is so dependent on this that some in the group have argued for turning back from all monkeywrenching (Zakin 1993: 310, 379).

Being committed to the strategy of moral suasion (public support) and to “helping” the litigation and legislative elements to work, through slowing down particular cases of logging or other development, demonstrates an acceptance on the part of Earth First! of the idea that the political system roughly works, even if so problematically that civil disobedience and monkeywrenching are needed. As soon as something subtracts from building public support, it ceases to be a legitimate tactic. Like civil-disobedients before them, they are wedded to the idea of righting wrongs by convincing the public that they are on the side of justice. As mentioned earlier, monkeywrenching is often kept quiet by both sides; to the extent that it is made public, it has to be portrayed as fun, safe, and entirely within the tradition of *civil* protest. Dave Foreman – key founder and a former part of the Earth

First! informal leadership team – is particularly careful to describe monkeywrenching as not revolutionary, not mere vandalism (given its potential to erode public opinion), and very much fun and ethical (Foreman 1991: 113–16).

For ELF, eco-sabotage is serious business, meant to – in the words of Rosebraugh (2004) – psychologically intimidate. Individuals acting under the ELF name intentionally publicize any destructive action, but not necessarily to win the hearts and minds battle. As seen in the quoted communiqué from the Pennsylvania case, they have decided that civil disobedience and monkeywrenching are not effective. The minimal necessary force is ecotage. Furthermore, this difference with Earth First! does not boil down simply to faith in one’s fellow citizens or worries about ineffective lobbying or litigation. Rather, ELF members often express their conviction that the contemporary Western political, social, and economic system itself is the problem, which must be approached only through radical means. We see this in Rosebraugh’s contention that environmentalism fails as a reform movement; revolution – an unseating of the system – is required. When such is the view held, using the least amount of force required looks significantly different in that actions are not limited by a shared commitment to democratic institutions and values.

In terms of tactics, the degree of violence or destruction can help distinguish groups like Earth First! from ELF. But it is overall strategy, undergirded by other beliefs and commitments, that prevents the easy slide from one to the other. Shifts in tactics entail deeper shifts in praxis. Although we have been speaking mostly in terms of strategy, underlying this are commitments to either the philosophical tradition of protest as exemplified and defended by Martin Luther King, Jr. (1986[1963]) – where protest must fit with public education, moral persuasion, and legal change – or to a rather straightforward belief in raising the financial costs so high that certain things are no longer feasibly done. Even deeper are differences in their faith in the possibility of reform and in the likelihood that less violent, or less destructive, mechanisms can work in the democracy we inhabit.

The overall fit of Earth First!’s radical activism, in contrast to ELF’s, with the logic of protest is apparent. It is also evident that Earth First!’s self-proclaimed adherence to a “no-compromise” policy is not altogether accurate. Their direct actions – from legal protest to monkeywrenching – are part of a larger process in which compromise is almost always necessary, and is even more so for the party trying to change the status quo. But neither is the “No Compromise” motto empty rhetoric. Earth

First! uses aggressive activism to push hard for positions well beyond the supposed reasonableness of mainstream environmental groups, arguing, for example, for zero-cut on old-growth and roadless areas, and for restoration projects that include removal of key dams.

The logic of protest in the democratic context depends heavily on public support – not necessarily that of a numeric majority, but at least of a critical mass. Radical activists bring attention to issues in a very *informationally-crowded* world by engaging in provocative action, which also strengthens their negotiation position with industry or government agencies. The goal of moral suasion – i.e., of changing the hearts and minds of the public – does not always fit neatly with the need to exert pressure on the opposition. Martin Luther King, Jr., was keenly aware of this as he described civil disobedience as both pointing out an injustice to the world and aiming ultimately for genuine negotiation with the other side (1986[1963]). The requirement in civil disobedience that one accept punishment for one's role in illegal protest, along with the rejection of violence, is meant to galvanize support, to prevent the label of “dangerous provocateur” or “terrorist” from taking hold, and, all the while, to create a stronger position from which to engage in compromise, which is especially important given the sometimes nearly overwhelmingly strong initial bargaining position of industry and government.

## **Compromise and integrity in environmental activism**

Compromise can play not only a positive role in environmental activism, but it is also an effective means of moving a pro-environmental agenda forward within a democratic setting, without pitting social and environmental justice against one another.

But what is fair, or just, compromise? Is it not the case that all compromise is, in the end, a capitulation – a loss of integrity? After all, it is one thing to compromise on who will pay how much for which public project. But what kind of compromise is integrity-preserving in the case where one knows that an old growth timber sale will irrevocably destroy something valuable? Martin Benjamin (1990) describes true compromise as a “splitting the difference”: two parties agree on a course of action in which both are giving up something in order to arrive at a conclusion that is fair for both. But again, how is compromise in the cases in which Earth First! inserts itself a situation in

which giving up something to industry provides a solution that the activists would think fair? For the activists, fairness would have to involve the 2000-year-old trees and the other organisms that depend upon them. From their perspective, moral integrity demands not giving in to efforts to destroy such precious living systems.

To clarify the place of compromise and the role of integrity in environmental action, we employ the tenets of Benjamin's philosophy of conflict, based on identity analysis and the conception of moral integrity. We will focus on the distinction between political and moral compromise (e.g., moral commitments can include democratic ideals and an awareness of irreducible difference), and introduce the spectrum view between substantive and procedural commitments as a way to approach compromise in process and outcome. In the next section, we will apply this analysis to the relationship between moral and political community; such an analysis will help us to illustrate the fundamental difference between beliefs and attitudes in political exchange for environmental causes.

Benjamin resorts to the conception of moral integrity as an essential component on which he develops his understanding of political compromise. Moral integrity provides a basis for an agent's identity, which consists of three elements that co-evolve over time:

1. A relatively stable and reasonably coherent set of held moral principles,
2. Patterns of verbal behavior that express these values and principles, and
3. Conduct that consistently employs declared values.

These three elements constitute "the formal structure of one's identity as a person" (Benjamin 1990: 51). The grounding category for identity is that of *integrity*, which is the disposition to maintain agreement between one's declarations, deeds, and highly cherished, authentic values and moral principles. Individual integrity requires "that one's words and deeds generally be true to a substantive, coherent, and relatively stable set of values and principles to which one is genuinely and freely committed" (Ibidem: 51–52). Moral integrity consists of two dimensions: (i) internal integrity, which refers to the inner (partial and always in progress) coherence of one's life, and (ii) an external integrity, which refers to the extent to which one fits into his or her environment: "integrity can be viewed internally, from the point of view of the agent, and externally, from the point of view of others" (Ibidem: 52). Corresponding with the internal and external dimensions of moral integrity, Benjamin distinguishes its internal and external *importance*. Internal integrity

provides a structure for a unified full and unalienated life, while its external dimension provides the basis for reliance, trust, friendship, and love in the social and relational context. Social relationships and institutions social relationships and institutions would be impossible without a certain amount of integrity in the individuals who compose them. Integrity is crucial in social organizations that involve a lot of interdependence and need coordination among its members (Ibidem: 52–53).

While the conception of internal integrity is common sense, the idea of external integrity is as important, but not readily apparent. Emmanuel Picavet (2015) points to its relevance (albeit without speaking in terms of integrity, *per se*) in the context of normative dynamics in society and the experience and manifestations of disagreement: compliance to externally established, societal norms and expectations can be an objective in its own right, and is motivated in many ways – for example by the need to maintain a certain reputation or to maintain social cooperation. Even without internalization of the external norms (i.e., when a moral agent does not come to cherish the norms and values as his or her own), these external considerations play a role in both the making and evaluation of choices (Picavet 2015). Acknowledgement of the two-dimensional characteristics of moral integrity is essential to the positive understanding of ethically fair political compromise. Full, complete integrity can be achieved only when the internal and external dimensions are in balance with each other. Furthermore, healthy identity is built on the proper balance of these two dimensions.

The case of Ronnie Lee and Cliff Godmaan provide an illustration of how some dimensions of moral integrity can be entangled in extremist action (Nagtzaam 2017). These two Animal Liberation Front (ALF) activists were arrested in 1974 for attempting to set fire to the Oxford Laboratory Animal Colonies. By this time they had been involved in numerous environmentally-related crimes. They were also known for following a strict and honest moral code. Even the judge who sentenced them for their crimes recognized them not as common criminals but as sincere men of integrity (Ibidem: 50).

In the context of environmental activism, integrity analysis provides a useful way to interpret advocacy and the compromise commitments of activists. For example, in its early beginnings, environmentalism was characterized by an uncompromising style of advocacy towards a strong change in values, beliefs and behaviors, and breaking with unsustainable structures of social and economic order related to the globalization of capitalism, unfettered growth, and neoliberalism (Mulvihill 2009). With time, however, many thinkers, writers, and

mainstream activists realized that a strongly polarizing attitude is less effective, which led to oppositions arising within and between environmentalism camps.

A pragmatically oriented strand of environmental thought and practice has long argued against an uncompromising style of advocacy, seeing it as inhibiting change. Cooperation, compromise, and democratic interactions were considered to be more likely to build bridges between the policy makers, society with its current (but not always ecologically-minded) values, and a pro-environmental agenda (Minteer 2012). In terms of integrity analysis, the environmental movement initially acted in accord with its internal moral compass, while the external integrity aspect (reflected in efforts to discuss and find practical solutions with other political actors) has become more visible with time. Of course, one can immediately point to the argument that the environmental mainstream compromises too readily, or is too much in favor of politically strong interest groups like multinational corporations. Too much compromise undercuts the promise of positive environmental change, or makes it too slow at best. In other words, the worry is that political compromise undermines the moral stance environmentalism stands for.

A partial response to this worry involves the distinction between compromise as an outcome (that is, a result that satisfies the demands of all the parties, but also asks each of them to sacrifice part of what is considered important, thereby “splitting the difference” equally) and compromise as a process (granting each party equal procedural rights, without enforcing any demands on the other side), which is another crucial point to Benjamin’s idea of integrity-preserving compromise. Only compromise performed as a fair process *and* as a fair outcome is a compromise *sensu stricto*, according to Benjamin (Benjamin 1990: 4-8).

Compromise is a model for peaceful conflict resolution, but in this sense it cannot be a regulative ideal; nonetheless, it is a best resource for dealing with political disagreements in situations in which there is no way to reach consensus, especially on moral matters. But these situations are not just any kind of disagreement. Rather, Benjamin identifies specific circumstances under which compromise *sensu stricto* proves to be the most efficient tool that allows for political progress and continuous ethical debate on conflicting matters. Namely, he lists factual and metaphysical uncertainty, moral complexity, continuing cooperative relationships, impending nondeferrable decisions, and limited resources as the five circumstances that justify compromise in accommodating conflicts (Benjamin 1990; 2001; 2003).

A question arises regarding how integrity analysis aids us in understanding and applying compromise that fosters, rather than hinders, democratic participation in decision making. Acceptable compromise is not necessarily agreeing with the other side that a third, middle ground is the correct *moral* position. Rather, it is acknowledging that *all things considered* a third position is the best position (Benjamin 1990). It is easiest to see this as the difference between compromising one's moral position and compromise as it is necessary for the well-functioning of a democracy. In the latter sense, one sees a compromise position not as the correct moral position narrowly defined, but as the correct position when one considers several additional items, such as "the extent to which the issue admits of reasonable differences, [and] the importance of peaceful, noncoercive agreement" (Benjamin 2001: 281), and the various roles in which the antagonists find themselves (e.g., as citizens, managers, activists, and the like). Sometimes, when we take all of this into account, compromise becomes not just acceptable, but required. According to Benjamin, "[one is] committed to resolving the *policy* question in terms that pay equal respect to the contending reasonable positions and that stand a chance of public acceptability" (Benjamin 2003: 141, emphasis in original). In the meantime, all the parties may continuously attempt to persuade the other side of the rightness of their position (Ibidem: 136).

Political compromise, therefore, is an inevitable element of a healthy, functioning democracy. It does not require, contrary to common associations, moral capitulation. Rather, it can facilitate the discursive space of sharing and exchanging opinions on political and related moral matters, leading in turn to changes in subjective and intersubjectively-shared moral outlooks. The potential of integrity-preserving compromise is explained also by Picavet (2015) in the context of the role and value of disagreement. The demand for moral agreement is sometimes used in political philosophy to dismiss the value of compromise. But even moral agreement about issues of social justice is often accompanied by disagreement over interpretations and modalities of implementation of particular values and principles in concrete contexts. Picavet notes that the complementarity between moral agreement and disagreement gives support to practical, reasonable compromise as an essential element of political life.

Is it an overstatement to search for Benjamin-type compromise in direct action and the justifications of activists who are not shy about resorting to political aggression? After all, eco-warriors committing political violence are considered by opponents to be ecoterrorists. As

a matter of moral and political perspective (setting aside the reasonability and legitimacy of such a perspective), many radical activists argue that true crime is being committed by an unsustainable social order, multinational corporations, and states. It is the destruction of ecosystems or animal testing that is, as activists argue, an unprecedented evil, and no time can be wasted in stopping these eco-crimes and bringing about radical social change (cf. Nagtzaam 2017). This position exemplifies the importance of feelings about justice concerns and the role they play in shaping attitudes in political exchange.

With no clear answer as to why radical activists might commit political violence to further their cause, we will limit ourselves to applying the identity analysis in line with Benjamin's notion of moral integrity. The distinction and interrelation between political and moral compromise is crucial for uncovering the potential of direct action in a democratic setting. To fully appreciate the difference between moral and political compromise, we propose a spectrum-view of the relationship between substantive and procedural claims. For example, moral commitments can include democratic ideals and an awareness of irreducible difference. In situations of rationally insoluble disagreement on political matters, these moral commitments may urge us to be procedurally more flexible on strictly substantive matters. Elsewhere, Dereniowska (2017b) argued that for fair compromise, both substantive claims and procedural commitments need to be engaged together in order to safeguard the process and outcome from misrepresentation, misrecognition, exclusion, and deprivations: "a compromise in such contexts requires not only *an equal consideration* of asserted reasonable claims of underrepresented positions, even if these are radically different from the majority view, but also *equal priority* in crafting solution" (Ibidem: 121).

The spectrum view of substantive and procedural commitments allows us to reconsider the multiplicity of political motivations that underlie direct action. These motivations can be placed on a spectrum between extremist ideologies, on the one hand, and reactions to perceived injustice and structural inequalities, on the other hand. To the latter, a few points can be made. Any ideas or beliefs that radically contrast with the mainstream or with received and socially shared wisdom are not always smoothly assimilated, regardless of their reasonability or rational force (consider the provocative case for animal rights); this could be the case because of various kinds of path dependence or inertia (Dereniowska 2017b: 122). Heterogeneous social and environmental activism share in common a call for broader participation in decision

making, and for a broader institutional change process that eliminates the various forms of existing injustice. Collective action (including direct action) and other forms of citizens' engagement in political processes (e.g., participation in public debates or acts of civil disobedience) can potentially have corrective implications in rethinking democratic procedures, policy outcomes, and the legitimacy of both. Democratic agents express their discontents in various forms, and tactics chosen depend on a whole spectrum of reasons. The violation of procedures that shape democratic interactions can be last-resort expressions of dissatisfaction with the politics of exclusion and disempowerment (Dereniowska 2017a: 94). The analysis of radical environmental activism reveals that the above issues are often the case, once we consider the community of justice with which radical environmentalists identify themselves. Nagtzaam (2017: 1) associates violence underlying pro-environmental agendas with identity politics of a non-hierarchical, non-anthropomorphic nature: human beings and non-human nature are considered equal.

In many cases Earth First! is willing to compromise in the way that Benjamin suggests. For example, in exchange for the protection of a grove of old-growth Douglas fir, the group might promise to not protest a different, less ecologically sensitive timber sale. But there is another way in which Earth First! can be seen to be less rigid in their adherence to their "no-compromise" position. It is when we step back from a particular issue – e.g., from a particular timber sale – and think about how Earth First! fits into the larger logic of protest within the democratic context, that we see how compromise is an essential element of their approach, despite their motto. What we find is a group who is willing to back off of certain kinds of activism – such as tree-spiking – when others consistently object and when the reasonableness of that objection is clear. We find also a group which is acutely aware of the need to generate public support and which is willing to modify its behavior accordingly when necessary. The aim is not to cause as much fear as possible but to find a balance between, first, provocative acts that gain attention and slow down ecologically destructive practices long enough for legal challenges and legislative changes to take place and, second, the necessity of not being dismissed by the public as the "dangerous fringe."

## Direct action, community of justice, and political exchange

What are the conditions that determine effective use of compromise? Our suggestion is that it depends on procedural commitments allocated among the spectrum between the moral and political community. Specifically, seeing oneself as a part of a larger community in which decisions must be made is essential to a full appreciation and effective use of compromise.

Constructive engagement in compromise differentiates between the *moral community* and *political community*. The former relates to the community of justice – the community of morally considerable beings and entities, or claim-holders whose interests and rights must be respected. The political community, as we are using the term, is the community in which concrete decisions are made, broadly encompassing groups of elected representatives, engaged citizens, and parties who participate in making decisions on various levels, with different levels of authority in decision making processes and outcomes; in other words, the political community consists of political actors (organizations and people) in particular places and times, with actual power to make decisions or to influence decision makers.

The scope of the moral and political communities is not always symmetrical. The scope of the moral community is delineated by substantive arguments for moral considerability, whereas the community of decision-makers is delineated by more or less formalized procedures (themselves subject to evolution and change) that organize political life and decision making on various levels of institutional organization. There is a mutual relationship between the two communities. Ideally, the members of a political community respect and account for morally considerable claims. In practice (even if this is the guiding principle of political interactions), there are cases of pursuing narrowly defined particular interests, or simply, normative requirements stand in opposition to the extent that it is not possible to fulfill all duties towards all members of the moral community. Regardless of the source of moral-political disagreement or conflict, it remains that in situations in which collective decisions need to be made, the political community is where this happens, and the extent to which members of this community see themselves as a part of it shapes the experience of disagreement and ability to achieve a shared outcome.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Often decision situations, especially when involving fundamental disagreements regarding, for example, who has moral standing, are such that consensus is out of reach.

The difference between the moral and political communities, as the terms are used here, is analogous to the difference between a *moral patient* and *moral agent*. Moral patients are the recipients of our actions; they are those who possess moral standing and are thus objects of moral consideration – i.e., their interests must be included in the reasoning and actions of moral agents. The class of moral patients includes those who are moral agents (e.g., a normally functioning, autonomous adult human being), but also those who have standing but do not possess moral autonomy (e.g., children, non-human animals, and people who are permanently comatose or severely mentally disabled). The difference is that not all moral patients can participate in decisions that will impact their well-being, interests, etc., and not all patients can be held responsible for their actions (because they are not also moral agents). Nevertheless, their interests, well-being, or flourishing must be taken into account by moral agents who, in virtue of their agency, can be held accountable (Dereniowska 2017a: 96). The moral community is the community of moral patients, while the political community is the community of moral agents in the political context. The reason why we include the morality of agents in the political sphere is that moral responsibility has an important political aspect: it is inevitably connected with the exercise of autonomy and the freedom of moral agents, and with building ethical and democratic legitimacy (Ibidem: 96). Respecting and accounting for the claims of all morally considerable beings who will be influenced by the decisions and actions of moral agents is crucial to maintaining the values and normative order required for lasting trust in socio-political interactions. Finally, the normative force of moral considerability comes from the fact that it delineates the scope of the moral community that is not a matter of private morality, taste, or preference; it has an intersubjective bearing on the rules and principles structuring the external, environmental aspect of moral integrity.

The community of justice which radical activists defend is a community that to their minds includes non-human nature as having equal rights. To make the duty that correlates with moral standing legally binding, many activists are fighting for nature to be granted legal rights. The idea of nature having legal standing was proposed in 1972 by legal scholar Christopher D. Stone (1972), who considered this strategy to be an effective way to defend and protect the environment. Upon a closer look, the radicalism of some environmental activism can be interpreted as a response to the lack of institutional mechanisms and resources to directly include environmental concerns in policy formation and regulatory solutions. For most countries, there are no institutions

or mechanisms that would allow for the interests of non-human nature to be directly considered in their own right. One of the few exceptions is New Zealand, which has pioneered granting rights to animals and natural objects – such as the Whanganui River – by giving them the status of legal persons.<sup>8</sup> This move recognizes and acknowledges the political representation of the non-human claim-holders who cannot claim their rights by themselves; human political actors who represent the rights of nature can pursue inter-species and socio-environmentally balanced political solutions through institutionally enabled regulatory procedures. New Zealand's new environmental law paradigm, by encompassing justice considerations towards non-human nature, has paved the way for changing the dynamics of political interactions in environmental contexts. But in most other cases, the human-first and the for-human-profit attitudes flourish. When this is combined with the simple fact of human overpopulation, the lack of adequate regulations leaves the protection of nature for its own sake a matter of people's goodwill. As ELF member John Wade explained (in Liddick's 2006 study of activists' motivations), the difference between mainstream and radical activists lies in a response to mechanisms of environmental injustice: "The only difference between ELF and the Sierra Club is that we understand that the people in control aren't going to voluntarily give up their profits. Only by endangering their profits can we force them to act responsibly and give up a little of their short-term profit for what is more important for everybody. I would say there is always hope but I am not optimistic. There are just too many people" (Liddick 2006: 88).

One comment is in order here. As we consider radical environmental activists' moral orientations in relation to their moral integrity, it needs to be said that not all individual activists express the same degree of clarity in articulating justifications for their moral and political philosophy. In fact, the activists have diverse motivations and different thought processes, all of which is reflected in the types of direct action (cf. Liddick 2006, Nagtzaam 2017). Radical environmental activists can be driven by the belief that urgent actions are necessary in order to save the planet and its human and non-human inhabitants. Indeed, direct criminal action is often sought as the only way to bring about changes that need to happen quickly to make a difference, in alignment with moral code that embodies environmental values. Liddick (2006) in his

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<sup>8</sup> The Whanganui River received the status of a legal person due to the efforts of Māori, the local tribe of Whanganui in the North Island, to recognize the river as their ancestor.

discussion of the criminality of animal liberation movements and radical environmental activism points out that “the sincerity and depth of feeling among animal rights and environmental extremists should not be doubted, and it is exemplified by ALF (Animal Liberation Front) activists who risk legal penalties and see value in freeing the smallest animal, be it a guinea pig, mouse, or snail” (Ibidem: 81).

From a human-centered perspective, ecotage often raises provocation and opposition, whereas radical environmental activists defend their actions and views by differently framing their community of justice, and by reference to making justice and retribution toward the non-human world similarly to action against our kin. Consider Dave Foreman’s words: “If you come home and find a bunch of Hell’s Angels raping your wife, your older mother, and even eleven-year-old daughter, you don’t sit and talk balance with them or suggest compromise. You get your twelve gauge shotgun and blow them to hell ... there are people out there trying to save their mother [Mother Earth] from rape” (Foreman 1982: 4). Despite the provocative tone of Foreman’s words, caution is needed in ascertaining the relationship between feelings and attitudes towards ecological justice concerns. Generalizing or extending the conclusions onto the wider radical activist movement as a whole can be inaccurate, as the movement is internally diversified in terms of decentralized and informal organizational structure and membership (cf. Liddick 2006; Nagtzaam 2017).

Nevertheless, we tentatively conclude that separation from, and rejection of, the political community and larger society in which one resides is a tempting but ultimately wrongheaded approach for activists. Indeed, the way in which the notion of one’s community is conceptualized can drastically shape one’s conceptualization of the debate. For environmental activists, this notion is complex in the sense that it includes voiceless members (animals and other non-human entities) not recognized by other disputants as belonging to the community of justice.

## Conclusion

Environmentalism is bound up with issues of justice, although various environmental movements and strands of thought differently define justice concerns in terms of, for example, who belongs to the moral community, and various justifications for, and the perceived procedural force of, these claims in political interactions. Emphasis on the role of participation and procedural justice in pursuing environmental

causes brings to light the importance of feelings and attitudes towards justice concerns that underlie environmental action. This problem is not only of theoretical interest, but it also has practical import insofar as it helps or hinders the development of environmentally positive change. It seems reasonable to assume that such change requires more cooperation and collective action to the fore, and occasionally that may require compromise. But both practice and normative theory attached to the environmental movement have been somewhat suspicious about compromise, and for several good reasons. Compromise as capitulation of moral views is not morally acceptable in fostering a normative pro-environmental agenda, and too much political compromise can slow down or disable any serious institutional change process and progressive solutions for the environment. The controversial role of compromise for participatory environmental democracy is particularly evident in the practices and tactics of radical environmentalism – the facet of environmentalism which in itself has been marginally present in mainstream environmental philosophy debates, standing too far away from the logic of protest practiced in mainstream environmentalism. Yet, behind the controversies about the role of compromise on the one hand, and the role radical environmentalism can possibly play in fostering a broader pro-environmental transformation on the other hand, lies an interesting question: can direct action participate in effective compromise?

The radical environmental activist group Earth First! was premised on the rejection of continued compromise by environmental groups with industry and development interests. Their motto, “No Compromise in Defense of Mother Earth,” has been the driving force behind the group’s strategies and tactics that involve traditional civil disobedience as well as eco-sabotage. Events such as the Sierra Club’s compromise on dam building in the American West were seen as a betrayal of environmental commitments since the damage caused by the dam construction is so thorough and lasting. One of the group’s stated goals has been to demand so much – sometimes several times as much acreage for wilderness preservation, for example – that the mainstream environmental groups’ demands would appear more reasonable in political debates. This strategy appears, though, to reintroduce the notion of compromise even if Earth First! would never agree to this characterization. It is our position that although the “No Compromise” motto may have functioned well rhetorically, it is neither an accurate description of this particular group’s approach nor an acceptable strategy for environmental activism. This is not to say that the group’s ob-

jections to the Sierra Club's work in the middle to late 20th century are not well grounded. Rather, the notion of compromise needs to be more carefully considered.

Several preliminary conclusions regarding the strategies, tactics, and underlying justifications offered by various activists and groups lead us to conclude that some of the activists are deeply committed to the ideals of civil disobedience as articulated by, for example, Martin Luther King, Jr. (1986[1963]); this included a commitment to the rule of law, evidenced through the acceptance of legal responsibility when laws were violated, or at least targeting actions against specific injustices as opposed to against the entire social-political-ecological system. These activists are also wedded to particular conceptualizations of the human-nature relationship and democratic forms of decision making. These pieces usefully come together to help us construct views on activism. By pointing out the inconsistencies in the justifications for radical activism in terms of identity analysis, and the shortcomings of some of the complaints against it through the lens of political compromise, we argue that the views of both activists and their detractors on direct environmental action can and should be challenged. We conclude that employing integrity-preserving compromise in direct democracy strategies offers a promising way forward in facilitating a constructive change for environmental causes, allowing the maintenance of heterogeneous moral identities within the environmental movement and continuous debate among them.

These conclusions point to the potential for reclaiming democracy in the environmental sphere of human life and protecting nature on its own. The link between democracy and the environment – even if both theoretically and practically challenged – is unbreakable. This idea is growing in recognition both within environmental activist and scholarly circles. For example, as activist Kristine McDivitt Tompkins (2018), president of Tompkins Conservation,<sup>9</sup> argued, preserving wilderness is an act of democracy:

We believe that the transfer of private lands to the national park system is an act of democracy. A country's natural masterpieces are best held and protected by the public for the common good. They should be available to all people to enjoy, to remember that they are part of something much larger than themselves. National

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<sup>9</sup> Tompkins Conservation is a philanthropic organization run by Kristine McDivitt Tompkins and her husband Douglas, that operates in Chile and Argentina. Its activities focus on donating privately assembled acreages of conservation land to the Chilean and Argentinian governments for establishing national parks, restoring biodiversity, facilitating the development of ecological agriculture, and promoting what they call leading-edge activism.

parks, monuments and other public lands remind us that regardless of race, economic standing or citizenship, we all depend on a healthy planet for our survival. [...] There is a central truth to humanity's relationship with nature: We were born into it, fully dependent on it from our first breath. Two hundred years from now let the elephants trumpet, the giant sequoias sway in stiff winds and our descendants enjoy healthy lives aware of their place in this wild thing we call nature.

The kind of democracy envisioned by McDivitt Tompkins is based on an inclusive moral community of human and non-human claim-holders, and vindication of activism for the common environmental cause.

The link between democracy, environment, and activism was thoughtfully investigated by Kristin Shrader-Frechette in the context of environmental injustice (2002). She made a powerful case for ethical responsibility for solving problems of environmental injustice not only of professionals, but also of all citizens (*Ibidem*: 185). She identified seven arguments that justify the necessity of citizens to engage in environmental advocacy. These arguments can be boiled down to the fact that distributive and participatory justice is frequently downplayed in regulatory, political, educational, and social spheres – especially in relation to environmental concerns; furthermore, industry, governments, and academia display several biases about environmental justice; and finally, ethical neutrality about environmental injustice is ethically wrong and worsens the situation. Shrader-Frechette's case can be extrapolated to ecological injustices (i.e., injustices that represent not only multiple threats to human welfare, but to animal welfare and environmental sustainability). To continue this line of reasoning, from an ecological justice perspective one inevitably must ask where to draw the line between taking seriously one's responsibility for ecological justice advocacy by engaging in environmental action, and employing tactics and strategies that result in destructive political violence. Against this background, we considered the tactics and strategies of radical environmental activists, whose practices are often seen as extremist and in conflict with democratic practices, thereby losing the corrective potential of direct democracy. Our goal was not to justify or judge environmental direct action; rather, noting the complexity of the radical environmental movement, we looked at the possibility of conceptualizing and carrying out direct action in a way that fits the logic of protest. We conclude that the link between democracy, the environment, and activism is best utilized through the employment of an integrity-preserving compromise mindset and practice. Such compromise may support direct democracy for environmental causes by enabling more constructive practices, modes of advocacy, and action.

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