

Transnational Environmental Civil Disobedience as a Catalyst for Sustainable Democracy

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Abstract

Environmental civil disobedience can benefit the development of sustainable democracy by improving participation in the law-making process, environmental sustainability and social stability. Notably, it can strengthen democracy by giving a voice to beings that also endure the consequences of collective decisions while being under- or not represented, such as non-human living beings, ecosystems and future generations. Moreover, as many environmental problems span beyond borders, so does environmental civil disobedience, with the risk of undermining dialogue and possible positive impacts.

Keywords: sustainable democracy, civil disobedience, environmental ethics, environmental activism, resistance, future generations, diversity.

Introduction

Most human actions in present days have long-term consequences to future generations. However, the system of law tends to be largely self-preserving and ill-equipped to deal with the necessity of urgent changes such as the ones needed to tackle most environmental problems. They create new moral and legal dilemmas for which our current human-centred ethical and legal systems are largely unprepared. Environmental problems are diverse, such as climate change, biodiversity loss, pollution and ecosystem destruction. Solutions to these problems often transcend state borders, but binding laws are usually limited to the land of a state.

In democracy, solutions to environmental problems often involve civil and grassroots participation. Sustainable democracy can be defined as a political system in which every member is taking part in the law-making process, characterized by environmental sustainability and social stability. In other words, there are three main "ide-

al” requirements for sustainable democracy: participation in the law-making process by all members, practices preserving the quality of the environment on a long-term basis, and absence of violence in the socio-political system. However, each of these three requirements faces serious limitations. According to the first requirement, every member should be able to have an equal participation in the law-making process. Yet, in reality, access to law-making processes is restricted by political, economic and educational resources. Moreover, some beings affected by the laws cannot take part in its making, such as non-human living beings, undocumented migrants and future generations.

Second, environmental sustainability refers to the possibility for human behaviours affecting ecosystems and natural resources to be continued indefinitely. To assess if a behaviour respects this requirement requires detailed investigation in precise practical aspects that cannot be all covered by environmental laws. Environmental laws not only have severe gaps, but their enforcement is also occasionally unsatisfying. Dependent on regions and states, examples of gaps in environmental laws range from lack of regulation to control irregular uses of the land by individuals and enterprises, to provisional listing of hazardous substances leading to the improper disposal of harmful wastes. While governments, NGOs and scientists work on improving and updating the legislation, other individuals and enterprises, knowingly or unknowingly take advantages of these gaps to continue practices degrading the environment and depleting natural resources.

Third, social stability can be considered as a necessary condition for environmental sustainability. Indeed, the development and the enforcement of efficient environmental law can be assured only if the socio-political system is stable and flexible enough to allow adaptability. To face appropriately environmental challenges, innovative lifestyles need to be imagined and new laws must be drafted, while obsolete parts of the legal systems have to be amended or even abolished. Today, even in democracies where the participatory mechanisms are accessible, they are generally highly time-consuming and actual changes at the implementation level often come with too much delay to appropriately tackle urgent environmental issues. For example, in the Swiss system of semi-direct democracy where every citizen has the right to launch a federal popular initiative that, if accepted, change the constitution, the whole process takes a long time. It can take up to 18 months to collect the necessary 100,000 valid signatures for the initiative to be put to the vote, and then it takes several years until the popular vote takes place in order to complete administrative procedures and for the government to take position. Even if the text is accepted, the enforcement of the new law can also take several years, with transitory measures to accompany the most important changes. While this lengthy process of semi-direct democracy and law-changing is taking place, direct harm on the environment continues.

Environmental problems do not wait for lawmakers’ decisions and for the national governments to take a stronger political stance to enforce environmental laws. Biodiversity is reducing at a frightening rate and the effects of climate change are threatening the most vulnerable population. In these circumstances, obedience to some obsolete

laws and non-action could actually be crimes against the nature and future generations. Can civil disobedience be a catalyst for sustainable democracy? In other words, can disobedience to certain laws in order to tackle environmental problems provide the society and specifically lawmakers with a much-needed stimulus to make formal changes in the legal framework? To answer these questions, I first explore what environmental civil disobedience is. Second, I show how it can meet the requirements for sustainable democracy. Finally, I discuss how civil disobedience can be transnational and what could be the risks and benefits of thinking of it at a transnational scale.

1. Environmental civil disobedience

Civil disobedience is understood here as disobedience to certain laws, characterized by civility. I follow Milligan's definition of civility as referring to the respect for fellow humans, the absence of hatred speech or action, the absence of cruelty, and the avoidance of violence and reckless endangerment of others.¹ In turn, environmental civil disobedience refers to any case of civil disobedience targeting environmental problems. It includes the actions of protesters chaining themselves to rails to prevent a train carrying nuclear wastes to leave the country of production of these wastes. Activists climbing trees and refusing to go down to prevent deforestation are also considered environmental civil disobedients. With the rise of the awareness of the environmental problems and their ubiquity, cases of environmental civil disobedience are multiplying around the globe. They are creating challenges for the courts of justice, encountering backlash and support from the public opinion, and often putting the lives of the protesters at serious risks.

The media often play a decisive role in the success or failure of these actions even if the definition of the success and failure already would already require a full paper on its own. For one year, "The Guardian" has been recording the death of people around the world fighting for the environment in their series titled "the defenders". Some of them are environmental civil disobedients, some are on the right side of the law, and many are acting in the dangerous grey margins. An example is the paper opinion published on May 30th 2018 titled: "I was arrested for protesting against Canada's pipeline, and the battle is far from over. There is nothing logical about the Kinder Morgan pipeline – especially not the decision to gut environmental laws for it." The exceptional visibility of this action was partly due to the fact that a pipeline engineer and two members of the Canadian Parliament were arrested along with the hundreds of protesters². In this case, environmental civil disobedience mainly rests upon the intervention of the media to seek support of the public opinion, and to report their claims to the government and corporations.

1 Tony Milligan, *Civil Disobedience, Protest, Justification, and the Law*, 2013.

2 Title in The Guardian, 24 March 2018: "Canada: how a pipeline engineer got arrested in anti-pipeline protests – Two federal MPs among more than 100 people arrested challenging 1,000km line"

The role of media is crucial for civil disobedience if the latter is understood as a form of communication. Defended by authors like Rawls³ and Zashin⁴ and very popular in the English-language literature, the communication thesis says that civil disobedience is a form of communication to the target (governments, corporations...) as a last resort when other lawful channels have been exhausted⁵. It states that “the rationale for civil disobedience is to express opposition to contentious laws, policies, or practices, and cultivate support for reform.”⁶ In this view, civil disobedience must be nonviolent and public, and the disobedient must accept punishment for breaking the law⁷. It restricts the usage of “civil disobedience” as a moral justification for breaking the law to cases in which there are no other lawful tools available to communicate protest. It sees communication as the primary purpose of civil disobedience. Conversely, it rules out the claim of civil disobedience when there are other communicative channels accessible that do not involve law breaking. In this understanding civil disobedience is always situated geographically and historically inside a specific state bound by specific laws.

Several objections have been made to this thesis. First, unless we think that law breaking is morally wrong in general, there is no need to justify actions that appear to be morally justifiable, but happen to break the law. The communication thesis takes for granted the presupposition that we have a moral obligation to obey the law⁸, and only then attempts to justify it in terms of communication. This presupposition is clearly not obvious and requires further justifications that are likely to be done case-by-case. But it seems clear that one cannot have a moral obligation to obey an unjust law. On the opposite, one could even speak of duty to resistance to unjust laws.

Second, the communication thesis according to which civil disobedience is only acceptable as a *last resort* is applicable only in a so-called “piecewise just society”⁹. Indeed, if the society is largely unjust, then there would not be any reason for a member to have an obligation to obey a law that contributes to support an oppressive system of laws. Moreover, what counts as *last resort* varies greatly depending on the circumstances. If by filling a legal complaint an environmental activist exposes herself to violence from the police or from the organized crime –possibly risking her life, is she blameworthy to take illegal action and bypass the apparently “available” legal channel? Arguably not.

Third, laws are always quite general principles that do not answer all the practical questions of their applicability. Brownlee describes this problem as the gap thesis:

3 John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 1971.

4 M. Elliot Zashin, *Civil disobedience and democracy*, 1972.

5 See also Milligan, 2013, *Ibid*, and Peter Singer, *Democracy and Disobedience*, 1973.

6 *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Political Behavior*, Fatali M. Moghaddam (ed.), 2017, 98.

7 As argued by Rawls (*ibid.*), among others.

8 David Lyons, *Moral Judgement, Historical Reality, and Civil Disobedience*. In: *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, ol. 27. No. 1, 1998, 31–49.

9 Andrew Sabl, “Looking Forward to Justice: Rawlsian Civil Disobedience and its Non/Rawlsian Lessons”. In: *The Journal of Political Philosophy*, Vol.9, N. 3, 2001, 307–330.

“there is an ineliminable gap between the expectations of normatively valid formal offices and the moral responsibilities that underpin and legitimate those offices”¹⁰. A parallel gap that I want to point out is the ineliminable gap between what is covered by the laws at a certain time and the urgency of moral dilemmas. This is especially true for environmental questions, as every day, new scientific findings are bringing new elements in our reasoning and require the legal system to be quickly adaptable in order to face at best the environmental challenges.

Fourth, the communication thesis is wrongly limiting civil disobedience to claimed actions in the public sphere. Indeed, there can be cases in which it is more effective to secretly or anonymously take direct action. This way, the disobedient can continue to take direct actions in order to prevent irreversible harm. In contexts where the activist’s individual rights and safety are seriously threatened, it seems to me to be an exaggerated requirement to ask them to literally risk their life to claim their actions publicly. Proponents of the communication thesis may argue that in case of activists taking secretive actions for a moral cause, we have to speak of resistance, not of civil disobedience. Instead of losing time in disputes over terminology, the point is here that sometimes, environmental activists choose to take illegal actions secretly for a cause they judge morally justifiable, and they choose to do so “civilly”, in the sense we saw earlier. I include such actions under the label of civil disobedience¹¹, but it should not affect my argumentation.

These objections bring us to an important distinction often made in the literature between political and moral civil disobedience. Political civil disobedience aims at making a change in the political system by communicating protest and often uses indirect tactics and strategies to do so. “Indirect” civil disobedience means that the law broken is not the object of protest. A typical example is Greenpeace activists hanging a protest banner on a nuclear power plant. They are breaking private property law but are not protesting against it (at the very least, it is not their primary object of protest); they might protest security failure and the exploitation of nuclear power as a whole. On the contrary, moral civil disobedience is almost always direct, that is, the law broken is *itself* the object of protest¹². The main goal of moral civil disobedience is to prevent irreversible harm. An example is hugging trees and attaching oneself between the trees and the cutting machines to prevent deforestation.

Obviously, the boundaries of these distinctions are blurred in reality, and the expression of “civil disobedience” itself encompasses different types of actions depending on the context, with the greatest difference appearing in different legal contexts

¹⁰ Kimberley Brownlee, *Conscience and Conviction*, 2012, 11.

¹¹ The word “resistance” might be more appropriate in some specific cultural and legal contexts. See for example Simon Caney, *Responding to global justice: on the right of resistance*, Social Philosophy and Policy Foundation, 2015.

¹² Carl Cohen, *Civil Disobedience, Conscience, Tactics, and the Law*, 1971.

and linguistic environments. Yet these distinctions help us bring to light the clear idea that our moral responsibilities should always take priority when they conflict with formal and legal expectations. In Brownlee's words, "we are morally obligated *ceteris paribus* to privilege our special moral responsibilities before formal expectations when the two diverge non-trivially".¹³

Environmental problems are shattering our classical ethical frameworks, because they ask questions that seem to go far beyond them. Indeed, until now ethics have focused on regulating relationships between existent human beings and groups of human beings, providing us with detailed and deeply debated guidelines about how to behave with our peers and enemies. In contrast, beyond general calls for respect for nature, they offer little advice on how to act towards not-yet-existent human beings, endangered species and threatened ecosystems. In response, a multiplicity of innovative ideas about values and duties towards environmental elements are emerging. The importance of caring for future human generations in a more global and long-term perspective is becoming familiar. But how do we translate these misty ethical intuitions into laws that can be applicable and reach regional agreement to ensure their enforceability? This is and will take time, especially in democracies, where a majority of the population must be convinced to make a legal change. Meanwhile, environmental disasters continue to grow and produce irreversible harm.

2. Meeting the requirements for sustainable democracy

I argue here that civil disobedience is compatible with the three requirements for sustainable democracy because of the three benefits it provides us. First, civil disobedience can give a voice to underrepresented persons and to non-represented beings, improving the participation in the law-making process. Second, it can compensate for gaps in environmental law and lack of enforcement by temporarily postponing the damage or preventing it. Finally, it can also contribute to inducing the moral shock necessary to improve the legal system in a lasting way while minimizing violence. Let us explore these in more details.

An easy example of irreversible environmental harm is the case of species extinction and biodiversity loss. Endangered species do not have a voice in democratic systems, but they suffer from the consequences of the political decisions. Different proposals have been made to include them in the participatory system, such as having nonpartisan delegates in parliament responsible to defend the rights of the endangered species and ecosystems. However, up to now, none of them was widely used. In addition, delegates are still susceptible to be influenced by lobbies and personal preferences (favour-

¹³ Brownlee, 2012, 11.

ing the giant panda over the ghost frog, because the former is subjectively judged cuter than the latter). In these circumstances, a variety of grass-root voices may counterbalance the structural dominant power influenced by lobbies and other interests. Following Hettinger¹⁴, I argue that civil disobedience can be one of the ways to give a voice to non-represented beings, by doing actions in their favour and bringing attention to their position. For example, keeping wild grasses and hedges on the side road instead of cutting them low as the law prescribes it can bring attention to the loss of habitat for a species depending on it while directly reducing the loss of habitat. Planting an explanatory board can improve the odds of a successful communication.

Similarly, future generations are not currently included in the political systems but can be given a voice using other channels including civil disobedience. Not-yet-born people and children do not have representative in parliaments, but they will be directly affected by the environmental policies voted in the present. NGOs and citizen groups attempt to speak in their name but they have little leverage in the negotiations of the texts of laws and resolutions. To make their voices heard, environmental activists have already illegally broken into parliamentary sessions or general assembly of multinational corporations to urge them to take responsible decisions regarding future generations. Other more direct actions were taken. In September 2018, in Germany, the police evicted climate-change activists from their treehouses. The activists had been building treehouses over the past six years to prevent the expansion of an open-pit coal mine and the subsequent fossil-fuel emissions coming from the combustion of coal by the electricity company. They repeatedly refused to leave the site. This is a case of civil disobedience that can be interpreted as defending the rights of future generations.

Besides, for underrepresented and excluded people, civil disobedience is sometimes perceived as their last possible channel to take action to prevent an irremediable loss. In many political systems, indigenous people are a numerical minority in the democratic process and they have difficulties of access to the participatory channels (let it be simply because they live far from the cities and villages where voting takes place and where they can interact with the government officials). Yet, those who are preserving a lifestyle depending on their natural environment are also the most vulnerable to environmental changes. They also are at the frontline of the fight against environmental crimes such as poaching and illegal deforestation. In many cases, local remote populations are the first people to notice the threats and to suffer from them, far before the government and the NGOs. Then, if it comes at all, governmental response to prevent crimes against the environment or actions that are legal but highly detrimental to the environment takes time and may come too late. In such cases, civil disobedience is the last resort for local indigenous people to protect their habitats and their lifestyles from irremediable destruction.

14 Ned Hettinger, *Environmental Disobedience*. In: A Companion to Environmental Philosophy, Dale Jamieson (ed.), 2001, pp. 498–509.

In addition to giving voice to non-represented and underrepresented beings, the second possible benefit of environmental disobedience is to fill gaps in the enforcement of environmental laws. Illegal deforestation by corporations and multinational corporations is usually well organized and governments might be corrupted by lobbies and lacking resources to control and fight it. In several cases, local activists lay down in front of wood-cutting machines and sabotage them. In return, they might be murdered and their families threatened by organized crime associated to the deforestation activities in obscure ways. This tragic fight is taking place out of reach of the governments. Yet, civil disobedience can temporarily postpone the damage to the environment, sometimes long enough so that the government succeeds in enforcing the law and taking action. In short, when states fail to enforce environmental laws, or when states lack environmental laws, civil disobedience is a way to prevent irreversible harm and to denounce these failures.

On top of this direct effect, tragic stories of individuals fighting for their land can touch other populations and launch a social movement to support legal changes and better enforcement. The final possible benefit of environmental disobedience also relates to communication. Disobedient actions denouncing some practices, lifestyles and environmental crimes can create a moral shock to government officials and the larger population necessary to improve the legal system in a lasting way.

Disobedience is like a chameleon. It changes colour depending on its environment. The same action can appear as an act of civil disobedience, as a crime, and as an everyday normal practice depending on the observer and on the legal context. From the perspective of an aware disobedient, disobeying takes enormous energy and can be subjective.¹⁵ In some cultures, expressing disagreement with the standard norm can already be perceived as an act of disobedience. Jasper worked on moral protests in general and noticed that they are often rooted in a moral shock.¹⁶ If the action of civil disobedience is appropriately and positively understood by the general public targeted, then some members of the general public might experience such a moral shock that may push them to support or even join the movement of the civil disobedient. In this sense, non-violence is a forward-looking requirement of civil disobedience.¹⁷ Indeed, violence usually triggers emotional reaction and a crystallization of the opposing positions. It also engages the vicious cycle of retribution, excuses, justice and sometimes revenge. If a protest is to unleash long-term changes in a system seeking sustainable democracy, then it needs to be civil and nonviolent, in order to foster dialogue instead of aggressive backlash.

¹⁵ Elena Loizidou, *Disobedience subjectively speaking*. In: *Disobedience, Concept and Practice*, Loizidou Elena (ed.), 2013, pp. 108–124.

¹⁶ James M. Jasper, *The Art of Moral Protest*, 1997.

¹⁷ Sabl, 2001.

3. Transnational environmental activism

As we have seen, an important difference between civil disobedience and environmental civil disobedience is their relation to the state. Most of environmental disobedience is targeting corporations, multinationals and enterprises, taking public opinion as a witness and the state as an arbitrator. Corporations and multinationals span beyond borders, profit from legal loopholes and sometimes violate the law. Public opinion also spans beyond borders and indignation can ricochet across the globe. Then, can we imagine a transnational environmental civil disobedience?

In the literature, the idea of transnational civil disobedience already appeared in the context of social civil disobedience. Basing himself on the Rawlsian idea of decency, Allen argued that the international guarantee of access to the basic elements of the rule of law is a shared standard of global justice and grounds a global practice of civil disobedience.¹⁸ In a more politically oriented manner, some authors defend the idea that global civil disobedience can “offset the imperialism” of the wealthiest in our globalized world. For example, Ogunye writes that wealthy people have a duty to transnational civil disobedience to compensate for economic inequalities.¹⁹ Finally, Schock argues that transnational activists contribute to framing issues globally, to the internationalization of a movement, and to the “transnational diffusion of strategy” between individual activists who connect networks in different countries.²⁰ These three aspects are features of most international movements of environmental activism. What role does transnational civil disobedience play in the case of environmental activism?

On the one hand, moralities are in constant change, innovating new understandings and ways of acting at the best of the possibilities in unprecedented circumstances. It is just like a floating bubble, changing and adapting, influenced by cultural beliefs such as religion, and personal and communal experiences. Moralities do not know borders, and they change with flows of information bringing new worldviews and ideas. On the other hand, law is a more clearly defined frame that covers only a small area of the moral bubble and tries to force elements that exceed the frame into it. Law is crystallized with its own national particularities inside one specific state. Inside the frame of law, the frame of enforcement is even smaller, as many laws are unenforced. Environmental laws are regularly unenforced, remaining political greenwashing instead of becoming game changers in the field of environmental protection. In this metaphor, the goal of political environmental activism is to move the robust frame of law to fit the ever-changing moral bubble, and to expand the frame of enforcement. Civil disobedience occurs where the moral bubble is overflowing the frame of law. Activists then act

18 Michael Allen, *Civil Disobedience in Global Perspective*, 2017.

19 Temi Ogunye, *Global justice and transnational civil disobedience*. In: *Ethics and Global Politics*, 8:1, 2015.

20 Kurt Schock, *Civil Resistance Today*, 2015, 143.

in or about an area that is outside what is legal in their specific state, because they are trying to expand the frame of law to cover this area too.

The frame of law is different in each and every nation-state. So are the multiple moral bubbles that are also different between groups in one state, and even between individuals. Of course, different national frames of law have overlapping areas. The moral bubbles of public opinion inside two different states also partly overlap. What is illegal in a state A is often more limited than what is immoral. But what is immoral and legal in the state A might be illegal in the state B. Activists in the state B might then be able to protest against an immoral type of action in their own state without doing “civil disobedience”, while activists in the state A, doing the same action, might be criminalized. It might then be wiser to use the umbrella term “activism” instead of “civil disobedience” to discuss transnational environmental protest movements.

Nowadays, the ubiquity of the media and social networks make these differences blatant. I suggest that transnational environmental activism that includes environmental civil disobedience can contribute to the development of sustainable democracies by fostering dialogues at the borders of law and legality (as comparison makes apparent the relativism of those) and by breaking some taboos. Moreover, transnational networks of environmental activists can offer a platform and shelter to some environmental activists facing persecution and threats in their own states, maybe giving way to an emerging type of environmental political refugees.

Transnational dialogue and support between environmental activists can also skip the corrupted political elite. Indeed, dominant national political elites are related to, dependent on, and at worst corrupted by the economical lobbies. The economical lobbies are often defending multinational corporations who commit crimes against the environment and go unpunished because they take advantages of legal loopholes and they blackmail states into not enforcing environmental laws or not passing them in the first place, with the threat of leaving the country and taking away with them the economic benefits.

For many cases of pollution, the causes of an environmental problem in a state A involve another state B. The repeated haze crises are an example. Fires set in forests in Indonesia greatly contribute to the air pollution in Singapore. To compensate the lack of efficient diplomatic negotiations, transnational environmental activism can bring together individuals from both countries to develop innovative grassroots solutions.

Finally, transnational environmental activism can empower local minorities and offer them a spotlight in international media that may partially protect them from violence from corporations and sometimes governments. Led by the Standing Rock Sioux, the Dakota Access Pipeline protests between April 2016 and February 2017 drew international attention. The international community on social media actively took part in the protest online, making harder the identification of activists on the ground. However, the benefits for activists on the ground from online transnational support are to be nuanced. Indeed, in some south-east Asian countries, any contact

with a foreign organization and activist group, especially when they are perceived as “Western”, may unleash a narrative that these native environmental activists are “brain-washed by Western propaganda”²¹. So the advantages of active exchanges and transnational actions in the media need to be looked at in context.

On top of the risks of the depiction by the opposing parties of activists as traitors controlled by Western powers, civil disobedients run the risk of creating an agonistic dialogue.²² An agonistic dialogue refers to the fact that interlocutors are not perceived as agent members of a dialogue any more, but exclusively as adversaries. Because they may apparently reject the premises shared by the majority including the opponents, they risk creating echo chambers. They might receive increasing support from the audience already convinced, while ostracizing themselves more and more from the general public. Some may also argue that civil disobedience is normalizing potentially problematic events by questioning the validity and importance of the law. If the civil disobedient goes unpunished, one may also say that it is normalizing impunity.

All these risks are duplicated at the global level. A diversity of moral worldviews and values exists at all geographical scales. In our nowadays globalized world, the high pluralism of moral worldviews is confronted to fundamentalism and radicalism. To prevent the slippery slope of impunity and disrespect of law, opening a door that might be used by other violent extremist movements, it is important to insist on non-violence and acceptance of punishment, or, at least, on acceptance of dialogue with the authorities. I also suggest that in our multicultural world, civil disobedients themselves need to put a strong emphasis on narratives of commonness and shared vulnerabilities. If civil disobedients keep making efforts to improve communication towards the organization targeted and towards the public audience, it might contribute in avoiding the dangerous growth of an agonistic confrontation. In cases when communication is one of the goals of the civil disobedients, this requirement is as important as non-violence and acceptance of punishment.

4. Conclusion

Environmental civil disobedience is not an easy concept to grasp. It varies completely depending on the standpoint from where we look at it. Nevertheless, as the various examples I mentioned show, cases of environmental civil disobedience are taking place across the globe, challenging the inertia of the national frames of law and of the weaknesses in environmental law enforcement.

21 As I was told by many environmental activists active in South-East Asia over the last four years.

22 Erica von Essen, *Environmental disobedience and the dialogic dimensions of dissent*. In: *Democratization*, Vol.24, Issue 2, 2016 (2017 printed).

After exploring the idea of environmental civil disobedience, I showed how it can meet the requirements for sustainable democracy. First, it can help underrepresented beings such as indigenous people and non-represented beings such as future generations and ecosystems to take part in the law-making process. Second, civil disobedience is a way to temporarily postpone environmental damages by directly preventing them from happening. This often happens at the expense of the life and safety of the environmental activist. But in some cases, it can raise sufficient public support and protect the environment enough time for the government to take action. Third, if the activists stress the shared vulnerabilities and commonness in their communication with the general public who are taken as being together with them, their action of civil disobedience can foster a constructive dialogue in the public sphere. This open dialogue about the roots of the environmental problems is necessary to build democratic societies ready to make the necessary changes to become environmentally sustainable.

Finally, I discussed how environmental civil disobedience can be an aspect of transnational environmental activism. In our highly interconnected world, information and values are moving across borders more than ever before. Moralities and laws are being compared and balanced. As environmental problems transcend borders, the network of activists does too. It creates new challenges, in some very practical ways from the perspective of the local environmental activist connected through social media with other like-minded people all over the world. In this article, I brushed some rough ideas that open more questions than they offer answers. Yet this is an indispensable step in the exploration of new ways to develop sustainable democracies while tackling urgent environmental problems.

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