

Civil disobedience and radical democracy. Why people disobey in democracy?

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We would like to contend 1) that civil disobedience is a form of political action which possesses specific features and which is resorted to only in particular circumstances; 2) that, far from putting democracy in jeopardy or being antithetical to it, civil disobedience is one of its constitutive elements; 3) that only in democracy can civil disobedience emerge and develop.

Usually, these three arguments are difficult to subscribe to since the legitimacy of civil disobedience is highly questionable in democracy. The rationale for such a dismissal is well known: outwardly claiming a right not to abide by a legal law or regulation which is deemed illegitimate is an act that threatens a pillar of democracy, namely majority rule. All in all, civil disobedience in democracy is objected to for reasons of justice (evading the common law is an unacceptable option), for reasons of legitimacy (the interests of the individual cannot prevail over the interests of the community), for reasons of stability (the State must not yield to those who openly challenge it) or for reasons of efficiency (refusing to fulfill an obligation is a tactics that does not address, nor undermine, the roots of domination and inequality).

While admitting the soundness of all these reasons, we nevertheless would like to proceed supporting our three contentions and demonstrate that civil disobedience is a constitutive element of democracy - when democracy is viewed in a radical perspective (i.e. in accordance with its very concept and definition). Such a stance will lead us to analyze: 1) how the possibility of civil disobedience – construed as the acknowledgment of the inalienable nature of the individual freedom to consent – enhances the practices of real democracy and citizenship; 2) how the practice of civil disobedience includes, in citizenship or membership in a community, the withdrawal of consent and the possibility of a dissonant or disharmonious voice; 3) how people are able to turn an illegal action – disobeying – into a legitimate *claim* to a denied *right*. We finally expect to show that ordinary citizens make use of their political know-how when they resort to civil disobedience to urge democracy to achieve all its promises.

At-testing, Pro-testing, Con-testing. New Perspective on Politics, Oppression and Critique raised by Environmental Damages

Laurent THEVENOT

Concern for the environment changed the nature of politics. It made necessary to take into account a remarkable plurality of ways people engage with their surroundings for kinds of good which differ in their scope, from bodily and personal attachments to inhabited and familiarly used places, up to commitment in public causes which are worthwhile for the common good, or even more comprehensive global issues dealing with the future of the whole planet. Acknowledging this plurality of kinds of good, and the related practical engagements which secure each of them, is a condition to fully identify the damages affecting people. In which form are these damages *attested* as evidence provided to others and even to oneself? Through which demanding transformation might they be expressed publicly in the objection of a *protest* against authorities? How are they made common when people engage together in dispute and *contest*?

Innovations are needed, in the social and political sciences, to offer theoretical models and empirical investigations, which are more adjusted to environmental troubles. Having contributing for long to the now growing sociological interest in valuation and evaluation which follows the globalization of governing tools based on standards, objectives, benchmarks and ranks, the *sociology of orders of worth and engagements* has opened the investigation to a wider range of oppressions. Empirical research on environmental disputes or less public concern, with a comparative perspective in different countries, prompted these new developments and offered chances to put them to the test.

Environment as “nature”, environment as “place of dwelling”: Plural modes of engagement in environmental mobilisations

Laura CENTEMERI

Starting from case studies of mobilisations concerning the public denunciation of environmental damage and the opposition to infrastructural projects having major impacts on the environment, we discuss the complexity of processes of collective valuation of the environment as related to plural modes of practically engaging with human and non human beings. In particular, we highlight critical tensions that can emerge in the construction of environmental public causes between two forms of valuing the environment: as “natural environment” providing us with goods publicly recognized as such, and as a specific “place of dwelling” to which people are personally attached and that they come to know through proximity.

In their effort to raise awareness on environmental problems, local environmental activists are confronted with the task to reconcile public engagement and personal attachments. In fact, personal attachments to an environment can be crucial resources for public mobilization. However this is not always the case. A work of mediation is needed in order to reconcile different ways in which a same environment can matter to people.

Can Animals Disobey? The Engagement of Bird-Watchers as Sentinels

Frédéric KECK

Drawing on my ethnographic work on Avian Flu in Hong Kong, I will look at the way animals are used as sentinels, that is, as devices to send alerts on threats that are not yet recognized by governments. Taking birdwatchers as a case study, I will ask if this way to enter controversies is closer to engagement or disobedience. Birdwatchers are engaged as they are attached to specific places.

Yet they disobey certain rules because they estimate that these rules do not recognize environmental threats that are for them obvious. When birds send signals of potentially pandemic flu in China or of nuclear radiations in Japan, can we say that they disobey the governments who deny the evidence of these environmental threats? I will discuss the relation between perception, representation and evidence in the relation of animals and humans to the environment.