

What if non-humans had a political voice?

Joe Gray, Global Ecocentric Network for Implementing Ecodemocracy (GENIE)

Across the Earth, every hour of each new day, innumerable decisions are made by humans that have an impact on the health and fate of non-humans, the majority constituents of the Earth community. That these decisions are, on the whole, made without proper regard for non-human interests is evidenced by the ongoing mass extinction of species, populations, and genetic diversity – the overwhelming tragedy of modern society. A once-vibrant ecosphere is being bulldozed and homogenized, and there is needless suffering on a truly appalling scale. From the perspective of all but the most short-termist celebrant of human supremacy, it is clear that bad decisions far outweigh the good.

Towards an ecodemocratic representation of non-humans

But – as I describe with colleagues in a [newly published piece](#) in *The Ecological Citizen* – it does need to be like this. In our article, we state the case for ecodemocratic representation of non-humans across a range of geographical scales. We argue, among other things, why such representation is preferential, from the perspective of ecological justice, to simply having non-human interests accounted for through internalization within human needs and wishes – in other words, politics as normal.

To be clear, this granting of a far stronger political representation for non-humans is not just a theoretical possibility to be kicked around in academic journals like a hacky-sack. Rather, it is a potential tool for superseding anthropocentrism – the conceited paradigm in which moral standing is bestowed on our own species alone. As such, I believe that there is a morally compelling urgency for its implementation.

What could implementation look like?

One means of granting representation to non-humans in practice would be the appointment of proxies. It would be the responsibility of such proxies to represent their best-informed understanding of the interests of the non-humans to whom they were assigned. The proxy-expressed interests of non-humans could be weighed up alongside directly expressed human interests through discursive processes or voting-based mechanisms. And either public democratic deliberation or a watchdog could be employed to ensure that the representation-by-proxy was placed under scrutiny so that the process was not subverted. Back in 2006, Michael Saward called for the institutionalization of “multiple modes of representing a range of shifting human and nonhuman interests” in order to “test openly in argument varied representations of nature.” A decade-and-a-half on, there remains an urgent need to trial the implementation of inclusive decision-making processes. This need has motivated the founding of GENIE (the Global Ecocentric Network for Implementing

Ecodemocracy), a network of individuals from a variety of backgrounds interested in seeing ecodemocratic commitments translated into practice.

The potential impact

As my co-authors and I argue in our article in *The Ecological Citizen*: “By giving a human voice to non-humans, ecodemocratic procedures will help in widening the political community and have the broader potential to increase awareness of the interests, needs and lives of non-humans within a world all-too dominated by human societies.” Since such increased awareness could, in turn, create a political environment that would be more conducive to ecodemocracy’s implementation (on various institutional scales), it could foster positive feedback in which reverence for non-human beings supports, and is supported by, their strengthened political representation.

Get involved

If you are interested in becoming involved in the efforts to implement ecodemocracy, you can get in touch with GENIE via its [website](#).

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