The Ecological Democratic Faith of J. Ronald Engel

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J. Ronald Engel is a scholar with many facets and dimensions. There is a strong political element of democracy within his thought mixed with a knowledge of the ecological sciences. At the same time, his ideas rest upon a strong theological and ethical foundation. The manner in which all of these themes interact and interconnect makes Engel one of the most versatile and rich religious thinkers of our time. The purpose of this essay is to trace the key elements of the work of Engel and to explicate a well-supported interpretation of his thought.

Sources of Engel's Ecological Democratic Faith

There are three major sources for Engel's description of the Ecological Democratic Faith. These include Process Philosophy and Theology, the Land Ethic of Aldo Leopold, and the theology of James Luther Adams.

The first source of Engel's Ecological Democratic Faith is Process Philosophy and its theological counterpart, Process Theology. This philosophy is derived principally from the work of Alfred North Whitehead. Engel claims that the ecological worldview and democratic values "share a common first principle: individual-in-community, or unity-in-diversity."1 Engel further claims that democratic values and the ecological worldview come together in this first principle. "Certainly in those modes of Western thought loosely associated with, or influenced by, process philosophy and theology, the fit is close."2

Engel includes a quotation from Whitehead's Modes of Thought to illustrate what he perceives to be the interchangeability of the terms "nature" and "democracy."

> The basis of democracy is the common fact of value experience, as constituting the essential nature of each pulsation of actuality. By reason of this character, constituting reality, the conception of morals arises. We have no right to deface the value experience, which is the very essence of the universe. Existence, in its own nature, is the upholding of value intensity. Also no unity can separate itself from the others, and from the whole. And yet each unit exists in its own right.3

Engel claims that few would disagree with him if he were to substitute "nature" for the term "democracy" in the quotation above.4 In Whitehead's metaphysics, existence is constituted by a series of units of actuality through time. As he indicates in the above passage, these units exist in themselves distinct from other such units. However, they also converge or coalesce into one experience. Each unit is related in some sense to every other, and therefore to the whole.

In this passage, Engel draws upon Whitehead to convey that these units of actuality have inherent value. As such, the relationships between these units are

moral relationships. A moral relationship, in this passage, is the mutual affirmation of the individual uniqueness of each unit, and its relations to all other units of actuality. According to Whitehead, the very nature of the universe is such that it supports morality by respecting the uniqueness of every individual and the community of individuals.

The community of these individual units of actuality is very important to Whitehead's metaphysics. Such a community he calls a "Nexus," and defines it in the following way:

> The general common function exhibited by any group of actual occasions is that of mutual immanence. In Platonic language, this is the function of belonging to common Receptacle. If the group be considered merely in respect to this basic property of mutual immanence, however otherwise lacking in common relevance, then-conceived as exemplifying this general connectedness-the group is termed a Nexus.5

The notion of a Nexus is the broadest possible grouping of individuals. Mutual immanence here indicates that all of the units of actuality are present or related in some way to all other actual units.6 Thus all of the individuals within a Nexus remain individuals with unique characteristics. However, because there is some relationship, or some reflection, of all other actual occasions within them, there is also an understanding of the interrelatedness of each individual and their dependence upon the whole. All of these actual occasions are mutually immanent within each other.

Whitehead's metaphysics is important for Engel's ecological worldview. Within this worldview, the first principle is the "individual-in-community" in which both individual and community are affirmed and not pitted against each other. The Ecological Democratic Faith is held by persons who become aware of their embeddedness within the larger community of a democracy and the natural environment. To be an Ecological Democratic citizen is to become aware of the Nexus of oneself and one's environment, and to affirm both the uniqueness of the individual and the responsibility to the whole community.7

The second major source that Engel uses to explain the Ecological Democratic Faith is the Land Ethic of Aldo Leopold. Leopold defines his Land Ethic as, "A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise."8

The biosphere is referred to as a "community" in this passage. This implies that the sum of the individual members of the biosphere make up a community analogous to a community of humans that constitutes a social society. This means that each person should have a widening concern for other members of the community. Leopold characterizes this widening concern for all living things and for the land itself as follows.

> All ethics so far evolved rest upon a single premise: that the individual is a member of a community interdependent parts. His instincts prompt him to compete for his place in that community, but his ethics prompt him also to co-operate (perhaps in order that there may be a place to compete for). The land ethic simply enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals, of collectively: the land.9

Leopold's definition of the Land Ethic is compatible with the metaphysics of Process Philosophy as articulated by Whitehead. In both cases there is a respect for the individual members of the community because of a recognition of the larger community. Thus there is an awareness of the individual not merely as an individual, but as an individual-in-community. Leopold calls this awareness becoming a citizen of the land.10 Seeing everyone as an individual-in-community is a recognition of the interdependent, interconnected relationship of any distinct individual to the whole and to all other individuals. To think of an individual as an isolated self, unreliant upon other individuals, is incompatible with this understanding of the ecological worldview.

Leopold supports the claim that individuals are not isolated, but rather citizens of the land in the following passage:

> To sum up: a system of conservation based solely on economic self-interest is hopelessly lopsided. It tends to ignore, and thus eventually to eliminate, many elements in the land community that lack commercial value, but that are (as far as we know) essential to its healthy functioning. It assumes, falsely, I think, that the economic parts of the biotic clock will function without the uneconomic parts.11

To assume that one group of individuals within a community is worthier for conservation than another group, based solely upon their economic value, is mistaken in Leopold's view. The view he criticizes states that one group can exist independently of all of the others; both the economically valuable and invaluable are independent of each other. This view assumes that there is a separation or a cleavage between the human realm of economics and the natural biotic community. In fact, humans are a part of the community of the natural world, and their economic behaviors have an impact upon the whole and upon other members of the natural community. "In all of these cleavages, we see repeated the same basic paradoxes: man the conqueror versus the biotic citizen; science the sharpener of his sword versus science the searchlight on the universe; land the slave and servant versus land the collective organism."12

Interestingly, Leopold claims that, "The evolution of a land ethic is an intellectual as well as emotional process."13 Leopold argues from a rational perspective that the land is an interdependent community. Here he adds that the non-rational is important to the land ethic as well. The emotional or aesthetic element is important to Engel because he argues that the ecological worldview is a religious

faith that includes both the rational values of a democracy, but also the non-rational experience of the wilderness.14

The ecological worldview sees the individual within the community of the natural environment. As such, the individual is a citizen of the natural environment. The land ethic is a way of both seeing the fundamental relationality between humans, the environment, and each other, but also acting in a moral way in light of that understanding. For Engel, citizenship takes on a central role. It is the way in which we reflect upon our place within the natural world and proceed in a moral course of action in light of our reflections. Engel agrees with Leopold's indictment of a dualism between what he calls Modernism or Individualism, but adds that the human realm still has possibilities.15 If humans can act in such a way that violates the land ethic as Leopold has described it, then it follows that they can also act in accordance with it as well. It is at this point that Engel asserts that the values of democracy are commensurate with the land ethic of ecology.

The final source of Engel's Ecological Democratic Faith is the Unitarian theologian James Luther Adams. Engel finds in Adams a grounding for the Ecological Democratic Faith in Unitarian Universalist thought and the principal source for democratic values. A brief summary of Adams' thought is necessary to highlight the important connections between he and Engel. Engel references a large amount of Adams' thought, and his ideas will be important in the next section.

For James Luther Adams perhaps the most prominent of the democratic values is freedom.

> At other times voluntaryism is defined as the rule of persuasion instead of coercion. These features, to be sure, belong to freedom, but definitions of this sort fall short of grasping its essential social meaning, for they center attention too much upon the individual as an isolated entity; thus they fail to take explicitly into account the institutional ingredient, namely the freedom to form, or to belong to, voluntary associations that can bring about innovation or criticism in the society. Freedom in this institutional sense distinguishes the democratic society from any other.16

Here we see that Adams affirms freedom as the principal value of a democratic society. However, he does so with a particular emphasis upon the social. Much like Whitehead, Adams asserts that the individual, as a member of a democratic society, does not exist on his or her own. In order for freedom to exist, there must also be community.

Voluntary associations are central to the practice of democracy for Adams:

> As against Hobbes the theorists of democracy have asserted that only through the exercise of freedom of association can consent of the

> governed become effective; only through the exercise of freedom of association can the citizen of democracy participate in the process that gives shape to public opinion and to public policy. For this reason we may speak of the voluntary association as a distinctive and indispensable institution of democratic society.17

Freedom is not the action of an isolated individual independent of every other individual. To the contrary, freedom is most effectively practiced within the context of a voluntary association. Within these associations, individuals join forces collectively to work for the common good of all of the members. Allowing people to form these associations prevents tyranny by any single individual at the top of the political system, as Hobbes advocated. Voluntary associations, according to Adams, distribute power among people, provide a platform for political and social critique and dissent, and "is the training ground of the skills that are required for viable social existence in a democracy."18

The notion of a covenant is another idea that is important to both Adams and Engel. Adams connects the notion of covenant to his understanding of a voluntary association. Adams notes that voluntary associations were important among the left wing of the Radical Reformation, which was committed to disestablishing religion from state control. In the American context, the Unitarian minister William Ellery Channing was a prolific creator of voluntary associations in New England.19 For these liberal Protestants, the idea of a covenant was central to the practice of voluntary associations.

The covenant is for Adams the religious paradigm of human relationships:

> There is no such thing as a completely isolated being. Human beings are in relationship, and bonding is a characteristic feature of this relationship. Bonding is the development of attachment, loyalty, affection. It generates the collectivities that function in history. In bonding, human beings develop a sense of the past and of the future and even a philosophy of being.20

Here again we see Adams' insistence in the social nature of being human. Bonding, or forming a relationship, is an inevitable part of human life. Forming collectivities such as voluntary associations are a matter of intentionality. Members of voluntary associations intentionally form a community and cultivate relationships. Covenant is the name given to the intentional relationships cultivated within a community.

Furthermore, according to Adams, covenants are promises or commitments made to others to maintain a relationship.21 A covenant entails being responsible for one's actions and the actions of the collective. As a result, each person has "Responsibility for promoting mercy and justice, especially for the deprived, [which] requires criticizing those who have power in the society."22

Thus democratic responsibility within a voluntary association entails a prophetic critique of the status quo. Critical dissent is an important part of democratic freedom, and voluntary associations provide a safe community for this to occur. Although a covenant is a collective, it is also geared toward the individual. Being in covenant means working for the common good of all the participants of a covenant.23

Perhaps the most intriguing aspect of Adams' understanding of covenant is what he calls the "Covenant of Being":

> The biblical idea of covenant is what I call a covenant of being. That is, the Old Testament asserts that the people's covenant is a covenant with the essential character and intention of reality. It is not merely a covenant between human beings; it is a covenant between human beings in the face of reality. The fundamental demands and possibilities of reality are not created by humans but exist in its very nature. The understanding of reality is appropriate only when it is seen in terms of an ethical covenant. The covenant is with the creative, sustaining, commanding, judging, transforming Power.24

Here Adams articulates the depth dimension to the covenant within his existential theology. Humans encounter reality in their being. In making a promise or commitment in the form of a covenant to another human being necessarily involves making a covenant with the ground of being. The ground of being is present within all aspects of reality, so to covenant with anyone who exists is to include the ground of all being. Thus all covenants entail a covenant with that which transcends humans at their depths, and adds a religious dimension to the commitment or promise.

Engel's Ecological Democratic Faith and its Ethical Implications

In this section we will examine the confluence of the ecological worldview and democratic values in Engel's work. This leads to a discussion of the plurality of ethical perspectives contained in the paradigms of environmental ethics that are the primary loci of the Ecological Democratic Faith.

J. Ronald Engel articulates the Ecological Democratic Faith many times in his work. In a lecture delivered at Notre Dame University, Engel states the matter quite clearly:

> If we are to be moral, and if we are to survive, we must be both just and environmentally responsible. What possible good does freedom have if there is no means to pursue it, and no world in which to experience it?
>
> I therefore take it for granted that those of us who gather here this afternoon join me in the search for an ethic that integrates democracy and

> ecology. I also take it for granted that we are not alone in this search, but part of a much larger international movement that is trying to integrate the aspirations of the world democratic revolution, the environmental movement, and the peace movement.25

James Luther Adams alludes to the integration of ecology and democracy in his discussion of practicing democratic values within voluntary associations.26 However, he fails to elaborate the point. Engel develops this point in much greater detail by using Adams' ideas on covenant, voluntary associations, and democracy, and integrating these ideas with Aldo Leopold's notions of the land ethic and eco-citizenship. The combination of the two is Engel's unique contribution to the Unitarian Universalist religion and environmental ethics more generally.

Democracy, for Engel, is characterized by three important ethical values: freedom, equality, and community.27 These values come to us from the liberal, progressive thought of the Enlightenment. Engel describes the ecological worldview in the following manner: "Ecology or the ecological world view, also has widely diverse meanings associated with it, although we are accustomed to think it means one thing: e.g. the interdependent web of life of which we are all a part."28 Engel goes onto quote Whitehead on the importance of unity-in-diversity or the individual-in-community as a metaphysical vision of the ecological worldview.

Process philosophy and theology are important component, for integrating the ecological worldview with democratic values. Engel writes, "These two ideas are protean in the ease with which they merge with one another. Ultimately, I believe, this is because they share a common spiritual first principle: individuality-in-community; or unity-in-diversity."29 Engel claims that nature and democracy are interchangeable in Whitehead. Process theology and philosophy are avenues through which Engel is able to integrate democracy and ecology. Additionally, Engel would argue that Leopold could also be understood to integrate the ecological worldview and democratic values.

Leopold's land ethic emphasizes the interdependence of humans and the biotic community of the land. Performing ethical actions for the good of the land necessarily entails working for the good of the human community as well. Leopold argues, using the science of ecology, that when one part of the biotic community is destroyed, the effects are felt throughout the rest of the biotic community. Furthermore, Leopold also makes an argument for his land ethic using the idea of a democratic citizen of the land. Leopold claims that it is the responsibility of all citizens to work for the common good of the community.30

Engel draws upon these sources to confirm his position that democracy and ecology must work together. However, he takes these thinkers into new areas

that they themselves never went. One example of this is the issue of the destruction of the rain forest. Engel writes:

> Is the issue of the rain forests an environmental issue or societal one? Clearly it is both. It is an issue of ecojustice. Every step in environmental destruction has the effect of increasing social injustice, and every strengthening of social injustice has the effect of increasing environmental destruction. One reason this is so is because people and natural environments are never separated in fact, however much they may be in our ideas about them. Our choices and actions always effect both.31

Engel calls for the recognition that nature and humanity have a shared future. Either they will be saved together or not at all.32 The neglect or active destruction of the rainforests will have a negative impact upon human life even if that effect is years away. Rainforest destruction, and its environmental impact, is a reality no matter what the political philosophy of the day may be, and to awaken to this fact requires action. Ecological Democratic citizens embody this ecological worldview and carry it out through the democratic values embodied in their institutions and voluntary associations. Engel argues that the Ecological Democratic Faith requires social justice in the human sphere to enact the democratic values of freedom, equality, and community.33 The struggle to do so is the same as the struggle to maintain the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. The two actions are not separate but are in fact the same, because the human community and the wider natural community are intertwined. To be a citizen of the human community is to necessarily be a member of the biotic community by virtue of our biology. Humans require air, water, and food from their environment, and the maintenance of these resources within the natural world are needed for human survival. Destruction of those resources that have no direct use for human survival or convenience may still have an effect upon those environmental resources that are indeed important to humans.34 Thus, indirectly, the destruction of such places as rainforests have an effect upon humans. Recognition of these interdependent relationships is the awakening of the ecological worldview.

In contrast to this ecological understanding of the world is what Engel variously refers to as Modernism, Dualism, Individualism, Utilitarianism, or Consumerism. Although Engel advocates a marriage of the ecological worldview and democratic values, he acknowledges that this is not a view commonly shared.

> What is disquieting to me, however, as a religious social ethicist, is the abstract character of these many efforts to state the principles of a democratic environmental ethic. Most discussions proceed from the assumption that democracy and nature are separate and discrete "things" that somehow are pitted against one another and then have to be related to one another through a general concept such as global interdependence.35

Engel critiques the prevailing view that the environment and the human realm are separate in many of his writings. In addressing the problem of rainforest destruction, Engel identifies the "modern" worldview with resource conservation ethics: "The underlying assumption of resource conservation ethics is that the non-human world has chiefly instrumental value for human beings, and therefore the ethical reason for conserving it is prudential, a matter of enlightened self- or social interest."36 Resource conservation ethics sees two types of resources within the natural environment: those that are beneficial to human survival or consumption, and those that are not. This view of the environment is motivated primarily by economic factors. That which is valuable in the environment is that which can be eaten, sold, or otherwise used for the purposes of human life. That which is not usable, such as a rainforest that occupies land that could be used for grazing animals, should be destroyed or be employed in the most utilitarian manner possible.

Using the argument first employed by Leopold in his Land Ethic essay, Engel asserts that nature cannot be divided into the usable and the unusable for human consumption.37 This division neglects the idea of interdependence between the various parts of the biotic community. Those parts of the environment that are not useful to humans are as crucial to environmental stability, integrity, and beauty as the parts that are. The destruction of rainforests could have unknown, and possibly catastrophic, results:

> The consequences are great. It will be the end of the most ecologically complex and evolutionarily successful biomes on earth and will mean the greatest wave of planetary extinctions since the Pleistocene epoch. The number and character of species lost, much less the number of individual animals and plants lost, will never be known. It also means considerable loss of biospheric integrity. The ecological interdependencies of the tropical forests with other parts of the world, through such relationships as migrating wildlife, atmospheric CO2 levels, and river, ocean, and watershed protection, are vast and little understood.38

The effects upon the environment would be great, but Engel also argues that the effects would be felt within human society as well. The Ecological Democratic Faith asserts that the environment and human society can never be fully separated: "For people throughout the world, including the United States, it means the loss of unique forest products, sources for the enjoyment and knowledge of natural and cultural systems and vital life-support systems."39 The cause of this problem is the "ideology of modernization." "The key motivational factor that guarantees continued destruction of rain forests' native peoples is the ideology of modernization: the widely shared public ideal of increasing material abundance and consumption through increased technological and social control by corporations and the state."40 The antidote for the "ideology of modernization and consumption" is an ethical vision of the world based upon the Ecological Democratic Faith.

This leads us to the ethical paradigms for ecojustice that arise out of the Ecological Democratic Faith. These paradigms are different modes or ways of reflecting upon the Ecological Democratic Faith. Each one contributes something unique to the Ecological Democratic Faith, and at the same time, many of them overlap. Engel identifies eight such paradigms.41

First is the Wilderness Encounter. The Wilderness Encounter is the experience of transformation while in nature. Usually some sort of "spiritual" truth is revealed while in nature. The temptation of Christ in the Desert, or the Enlightenment of the Buddha under the Bo Tree, are examples of the Wilderness Encounter.

Second is Bioregional Participation. Bioregional Participation involves an understanding of oneself as a citizen both of a democracy and of a specific bioregion. Furthermore, it is the recognition that one's bioregion and democracy are interdependent upon each other.

Third is Embracing the Body. This paradigm calls for the awakening of our selves as bodies and the bodies of others. Embracing the Body means embracing all of the bodily life processes such as birth, maturity, and death.

Fourth is Respect for the Rights of all Individuals. In this paradigm, one recognizes the intrinsic goodness of all people and other biological individuals, including those who are oppressed or seen as useless. Within in this paradigm, the equality of all parts of nature is emphasized.

Fifth is Compassion for the Sufferings of Life. This paradigm, related to the previous one, calls us to relate to all individuals by recognizing their intrinsic goodness. Added to this is the need to show compassion to those who are in pain or suffering.

Sixth is Tending the Garden. This paradigm, as the name implies, is closely associated with agriculture. It values the everyday activities of nurturing and maintaining nature for human sustenance and care for the earth.

Seventh is Stewardship. Stewardship involves the prudent distribution and use of resources, much like Biblical story of Joseph in Egypt. Stewardship involves a utility calculus of discerning the greatest good for the largest number.

Finally, eighth is Artistic Creation. Humans in all cultures have turned to nature for aesthetic inspiration. This paradigm emphasizes the creative aspect of nature, and the beauty of nature that Leopold incorporated into his land ethic.

For Engel, there is no one ethical paradigm that fully expresses the breadth and depth of the Ecological Democratic Faith. Therefore he has developed a number of ethical paradigms for the Ecological Democratic Faith:

> My proposition is that if we examine the deep metaphors of our cultural experience we will discover that there is not one, but a plurality of ways in which democracy and the environment can and should be ethically integrated, and that our challenge is not to chose between them, or come up with a grand abstract philosophical synthesis, but to order them in such a way that each is able to make its unique contribution to our private and public life.42

These paradigms complement each other. Occasionally it may be useful to examine an ethical problem through the lens of one particular paradigm, where another might not lead to clarity on the issue. Thus the ethical limitations of one particular paradigm creates the need for a plurality of paradigms.43

Engel describes the function of these paradigms as follows:

> Each [paradigm], truly understood, which means pressed back to the most concrete historical experience on which it is based, reveals a different way in which our relations to one another and to the earth can be both creative and redemptive. This means that each is grounded in a different kind of experience of self, society, and the environment.44

The ethical paradigms of the Ecological Democratic Faith are relational; not just between humans but with the Earth as well. Here again we see that environmental concerns about nature are wedded to the democratic value of community and the individual within the community. Each paradigm "offers a basis for a unique set of moral principles for our life together as environmentally and socially responsible citizens."45 Furthermore, as Engel implies in the above quotation, each of the paradigms have a religious dimension. The "creative, redemptive, sustaining" nature of the Ecological Democratic Faith makes it religious because these are liberal interpretations of the Christian tradition. Within Christianity, the three persons of the Trinity perform the acts of creation, redemption, and sustaining respectively. Engel, a Unitarian Universalist theologian and ethicist, does not hold to the Trinity in a literal manner; he does find it to be a useful symbol to describe the religious nature of the Ecological Democratic Faith.46 Therefore, for Engel there is a convergence between ethics, nature, and spirit: "I am suggestion that it is precisely this rich plurality of ways of engaging our world that is most at stake in the contemporary environmental and social crisis, and in all our contemporary discussions of the relations of spirit, ethics, and nature."47

The plurality of the various paradigms leads Engel to consider other religious perspectives other than the Western Christian tradition. Engel, commenting upon his research in the Indiana Dunes, notes that his ethical paradigms provide an avenue for input from other religious traditions:

> On the one hand, this research [of the ethical paradigms] was stimulating for my thesis. It meant that these basic forms of engagement were by no means limited to American, or even Western, cultures. They constituted potentially a common language of human engagement that could cut across cultural and religious lines.48

Each of the ethical paradigms can be interpreted in light of Christianity. However, Engel cites Theodore Hiebert, professor of Old Testament at McCormick Theological School in Chicago, who claims that the religion of ancient Judaism in the Old Testament can also be understood to inform Engel's paradigms as well.49 Each of the world's religions can contribute something to the ethical paradigms of the Ecological Democratic Faith.

The Practice of the Ecological Democratic Faith

For Engel there are a number of ways in which the Ecological Democratic Faith is put into practice. Here we will examine the ways he describes the practice of the Ecological Democratic Faith. We will first examine the idea of Ecological Democratic Citizenship and the practice of covenant. This will then lead us to voluntary associations and their social and political goals within the practice of the Ecological Democratic Faith.

Ecological Democratic Citizenship is covenantal in nature. Engel asserts that although the concept of "citizen" has an association in the Western tradition with democratic institutions, we need to consider the personal, social, and ecological aspects of the notion of "citizen."50 Engel explains the addition of the modifiers "Democratic" and "Ecological" to the notion of "Citizenship":

> Democratic because this word suggests the ideal of a polis whose members are coequal in their moral freedom and in their active engagement in political self-government, who share the burdens and the joys of public life. Ecological because this word has increasingly come to stand for the full range of natural facts and values that have evolved on planet Earth and that are at stake in human activities affecting the biosphere. Democratic Ecological because in our judgment neither the e abuse and extirpation of countless nonhuman creatures and species.
>
> Responses to such a multifaceted complex of loc

Here again we see the interconnected nature of Democracy and Ecology for Engel. He further goes on to define his understanding of the concept of "faith":

> Faith is a truth claim about what "goodness" is of pre-eminent value in human existence and the Power or powers responsible for bringing it into being, sustaining it, and redeeming it from loss, brokenness, or futility. Faith includes a worldview--a way of understanding the relations of parts

> to the whole, and of past to future--but goes farther. It involves a risk of our wills as well as our minds on behalf of the goodness we cherish.52

Thus according to this definition, faith entails a risk by putting into action one's convictions about what is of "pre-eminent goodness." Faith necessarily entails risk and action. For Engel, the Democratic Ecological Faith requires action and risk, in the form of Democratic Ecological Citizenship. In carrying this out, Engel suggests a form of public discourse that bridges the "secular" civic arena and "spiritual" moral reflection. Democratic Ecological Citizenship thus bridges the secular and the religious. As Democratic Ecological citizens, we need to reflect in a theologically informed way upon the moral difficulties that collectively face us.53

Engel claims that among the primary goods that the Democratic Ecological Faith values as pre-eminent is the "affirmation of a rich plurality of forms of interdependence throughout all existence."54 This is in contrast to the dualistic worldview of the modern outlook that dominates in our culture, which asserts that the pre-eminent good is to dominate and control the Earth for human survival and consumption.55 Because Democratic Ecological Citizens hold an ecological worldview of interdependence, Democratic Ecological Citizens act according to a religious narrative of community that rejects rampant individualism. Personal consumption of materials is secondary to the common good of the planet and the culture.56

Some of the examples that Engel provides for reflecting theologically and morally as Ecological Democratic Citizens are process theology and the theology of James Luther Adams. From process theology Engel employs the idea of mutual immanence and the individual-in-community: "There is a definable constellation of relatively autonomous yet mutually interacting ways humans may dwell richly with one another and with the rest of nature in relationships of mutual immanence."57 Here Engel refers to Whitehead's understanding that actual entities or societies of those entities require their predecessors in order to go under a process of becoming. Thus "mutual immanence" means that there are interdependent relationships between people and the rest of nature that are necessary for our mutual existence. Thus they are mutually immanent in that each individual contains a part of the other.

In discussing the processes of the Democratic Ecological Faith and its creative, redemptive, sustaining power, Engel again refers to Process theology and philosophy as an example of the ecological worldview of interdependence:

> The most reliable and value-laden of these powers and processes are those that make for individuality-in-community or unity-in-diversity at individual, species, ecosystemic, cultural, and biospheric levels. The Earth is best described as a mosaic of coevolving, self-governing communities

> consisting of diverse forms of life, with intricately balanced interdependent parts and processes.58

Here again we see that the ideas of unity-in-diversity and individual-in-community are important aspects of Process theology and philosophy for Engel. This is because this view of the world is compatible with the interdependent understanding of nature in ecology and the democratic values of affirming both the individual and the communities in which the individual participates.

Engel also employs Adams' idea of a covenant for his description of Ecological Democratic Citizenship, in which a covenant is "a set of mutual promises among individuals who pledge themselves to act together for the good of one another and to and for the good of the whole they share."59 Covenants are promises or commitments that one makes to other people and to the group as a whole. A covenant then is an explicit commitment to a relationship; marriage is a covenant, and the promises made within a marriage ceremony are types of covenants. Covenants then are intentionally relational.

Ecological Democratic Citizens are able to practice their faith through their covenants. Thus, the Ecological Democratic Faith is lived out though the making and keeping of mutual agreements to work for the common good. These covenants are typically interpersonal and relational; however, Engel expands this idea to include covenants with nature and all of reality.60 Ecological Democratic Citizens covenant with nature by recognizing their citizenship within a specific area of land. By making a commitment to the Earth and the land, the Ecological Democratic Citizen recognizes the mutual dependence of themselves and the Earth, and works for the common good of both.

Furthermore, we must emphasize the connection here between democracy and ecology in Engel's work.

> The values and practices of democracy and the values and practices of ecological responsibility can and should be integrated. Indeed, neither democratic values nor ecological values will be known or respected for what they truly are until they are understood as interdependent parts of one comprehensive and explicit covenant of democratic ecological citizenship.61

Both ecology and democracy are affirmed by the covenant, and it is through covenanting that one is able to become a citizen of the Ecological Democratic Faith. Engel compares Leopold's land ethic to the Noahic covenant between God, the land, the animals, and humans. As we have seen, Leopold's exhorts that "A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise."62 This is a description of the kind of relationship we should have with the land and with all of

the Earth. To make a commitment such as Leopold's land ethic is to make a covenant with oneself and all of nature including the human societies within nature. "Each species is born into the covenant with a different kind of life to live. Indeed, it is of the essence of covenant to affirm each member in the relationship; each party of a covenant is obligated to and for the selfhood of the other member."63 The covenant carries with it both rights and responsibilities to the other. Engel expands the other to include all of the biotic community, to see ourselves as mutually dependent citizens within the natural world, and to make a promise to that world to maintain its integrity, stability, and beauty.64 This is the covenant of global citizens who work for the mutual benefit of both nature and humanity.

In his discussion of the environmentalist Wendell Berry, Engel develops the religious nature of the covenant as a practice of faith.

> Berry evokes the trait of covenantal faithfulness as the preeminent democratic environmental virtue: faithfulness to the land and to the succeeding generations that pass over it; faithfulness manifest in our investment on a particular place, in hard labor, self-sufficiency, honesty, humility, gratitude, generosity to the neighbor, and above all, right livelihood through skilled care of our small place in the cosmos.65

Here faithfulness requires something of the one who has faith; it is not cheap grace. Faithfulness requires work, but it also provides an opportunity to practice virtue and compassion as Ecological Democratic Citizens. Faithfulness to the Earth requires a prophetic rebuke or critique of the pervasive culture of materialism, individualism, and dualism. The prophets of the Old Testament called the people back to follow the covenant that their ancestors had made with God. For Ecological Democratic Citizens, it is necessary to call the world back to its covenant to the Earth and with all of being. It is a revolution in the way we view and treat the Earth and our political communities.66

This brings us to the nature and goals of voluntary associations within Engel's thought. Engel incorporates James Luther Adams' thought at this point as well. The Ecological Democratic Faith is practiced through explicitly relational covenants to other people and to the Earth. A community of people who have made such a covenant is a voluntary association for Engel.67 In describing the origin of voluntary associations, both Engel and Adams claim that voluntary associations were places where the secular and the sacred met. Engel writes:

> Here at least in principle, was the opportunity for all citizens to participate as equals in uncoerced democratic discussion, for radically different perspectives to come together in shared search for the common good, for dissent, and for the building of consensus on social policy. Voluntary associations, then, were the free sacred spaces where the grace of democratic social salvation was most richly and concretely manifest.68

Indeed, for an Ecological Democratic Citizen the secular and sacred are very close. In fighting against a dualistic worldview, the Ecological Democratic Citizen asserts that the things that are designated secular and sacred are both part of a larger interdependent community that includes both human society and the natural environment. The goal of voluntary associations is to search for the common good of both. Engel asserts over and over that this is the case.69 In providing a prophetic critique of the individualism of modernism, he offers an alternative with the Ecological Democratic Faith.

> For covenant is a radical challenge to our Western liberal individualistic understandings of democracy. The new covenant assumes that there is a common good in which all participate, a common good that is the ultimate source, and end, of all our individual goods. It means understanding democracy in terms of the principle of community.70

This last quote is indicative of the type of moral analysis that is at the center of the Ecological Democratic Faith. It is a communitarian ethic.

Communitarian ethics is a form of ethics that wishes to curb extreme individualism in our culture and ethical thinking in general. Instead of seeking our own personal gain, the Communitarians urge us to consider the common good of the entire community.71 The community, rather than the individual, becomes the locus of moral action. Communitarians do not deny the value of democratic ethics that affirm individuals, but rather they assert that individuals are most likely to thrive when the good of the entire community is considered. All of us live our lives as members of communities, and we need to form a covenant to make decisions through public discourse that does not seek consensus, but rather equal consideration of all voices. As noted by sociologist Robert Bellah, this covenant is sometimes recognized as religious:

> Democratic communitarianism is based on the value of the sacredness of the individual, which is common to most of the great religions and philosophies of the world. (It is expressed in the biblical religion through the idea that we are created in the image and likeness of God.)72

Bellah's Democratic Communitarianism, like the Ecological Democratic Faith, seeks the common good of the community, and fights against "ontological individualism."73 Ontological individualism is the assumption within our culture that the individual is an isolated, inviolable being. Both Democratic Communitarianism and the Ecological Democratic Faith value voluntary associations that provide a sacred space for democratic values and a prophetic critique of a materialist, dualistic, individualistic society.

The clearest example of the Ecological Democratic Faith as a communitarian ethic is found in Engel's writings on economic development. One of the main

goals of the voluntary association of covenanted Ecological Democratic Citizens is environmentally friendly economic development. In writing about development, Engel claims that state and economic institutions are oppressing the human spirit and liberation is needed.74 Such liberation would not only be living out the covenant with our fellow human beings but also the covenant with the ground of being. Here Engel employs Adams' notion of a covenant of being and applies it to an ethic of global development.

> This bondage is evident in the greed, lust, selfishness, and craving for pleasure and power that are the real motivating powers behind the dominant materialist worldview. For the religions of the world, a change in the human will itself is necessary, a deliverance from the bondage of the human spirit. This can only be done with the help of spiritual disciplines that restore the proper relationship of human beings to the ground of being, disciplines that depend upon religious insight and ultimately, upon faith.75

The state and market institutions that perpetuate economic development need to consider the common good, including the environment, instead of solely focusing on their individual interests. The transformation of the materialist worldview is a religious transformation that requires nothing less than an intervention from the Holy Spirit! This is because we are citizens not only to a social community, to which we have covenants, but we are also citizens of the Earth, and must respect our covenant to the ground of being. Transformation comes about within the context of voluntary associations of Ecological Democratic Citizens. Commenting on the contributors to his book on global development, Engel claims:

> However different their methods of approach, their grounds for moral truth, their cultural and social context, this fact stands out: they share the agenda of evaluating sustainable development to a global ethic, an ethic that recognizes and promotes the mutuality of ecological and social values in concrete living communities.76

The values of democracy and the worldview of ecology are promoted within these communities. Furthermore, we see here that the communities that support the Ecological Democratic Faith can exist within a plurality of cultures and societies. The work of Ecological Democratic Citizens cannot be limited to one nation or bioregion. All of these communities assert that development, or any other project of the Ecological Democratic Faith, is a concern for all on the planet. Since all of these communities are interdependent according to the ecological worldview, all of them belong to a large community and affirm their mutual covenant to the ground of being. The promotion of the Ecological Democratic Faith is the goal, the common good, of all Ecological Democratic Citizens, and therefore is a communitarian ethic. It is the common good for us all

and the planet that we call home.

Conclusion

The Ecological Democratic Faith of J. Ronald Engel is a Unitarian Universalist theology for the twenty-first century. While Ecological Democratic Faith may be the basis for the next generation of Unitarian Universalist theologians, it also widens the scope of the Unitarian Universalist tradition to consider religious and ethical paradigms throughout the world. It combines the ecological and scientific worldview of interdependence and interconnection of all elements of the universe with the practical and political realities of democracy. These two together provide a theology and an ethic of religious living and action that has relevance not only to the church but also to "secular" culture at large. Few thinkers are able to have at their command the diverse understanding of so many fields of thought, and to have them come to bear on the religious situation of the current age. Unitarian Universalism, as the current but not exclusive residence of the Ecological Democratic Faith, has a significant theological role to play in the coming millennium.

Notes

1 Ronald Engel. Earth Spirituality is a Many-Splendored Thing. Collegium Paper October 10, 1996. p. 12.

2 Ibid. p. 12.

3 Alfred North Whitehead. Modes of Thought. (New York: Free Press, 1938) p. 111.

4 J. Ronald Engel. Earth Spirituality. p. 12.

5 Alfred North Whitehead. Adventures of Ideas. (New York: Free Press, 1933) p. 201.

6 Whitehead goes on to emphasize that future occasions are possible, not actual, and so mutual immanence would not apply to occasions that have not yet occurred. Ibid. p. 203.

7 J. Ronald Engel. Faith of Democratic Ecological Citizenship. p. S32.

8 Aldo Leopold. A Sand County Almanac and Sketches Here and There. (London: Oxford, 1949) p. 224-225.

9 Ibid. p. 203-204.

10 Ibid. p. 204.

11 Ibid. p. 214.

12 Ibid. p. 223.

13 Ibid. p. 225.

14 J. Ronald Engel. Search for a Democratic Environmental Ethic. (Speech at Notre Dame University November 11, 1991) p. 10.

15 J. Ronald Engel. Ecology and Social Justice: The Search for a Public Environmental Ethic. p. 252.

16 James Luther Adams. Being Human Religiously. p. 56.

17 James Luther Adams. The Indispensable Discipline of Responsibility: Voluntary Associations in The Prophethood of all Believers. Ed. Beach, George K. (Boston: Beacon, 1986) pp. 256-257.

18 Ibid. p. 258.

19 Ibid. pp. 258-260

20 James Luther Adams. The Prophetic Covenant and Social Concern in An Examined Faith; Social Context and Religious Commitment. Ed. Beach, George K. (Boston: Beacon, 1991) p. 234.

21 Ibid. p. 239.

22 Ibid. p. 239.

23 Ibid. p. 240.

24 Ibid. p. 240.

25 J. Ronald Engel. The Search for a Democratic Environmental Ethic. Lecture delivered to Notre Dame University November 11, 1991. p. 1.

26 James Luther Adams. An Examined Faith. p. 241.

27 J. Ronald Engel. Earth Spirituality is a Many-Splendored Thing. p. 12.

28 Ibid. p. 12.

29 Ibid. p. 12.

30 Ibid. p. 14.

31 J. Ronald Engel. Ecology and Social Justice. p. 253.

32 Ibid. p. 243.

33 Ibid. p. 244.

34 Ibid. p. 246.

35 J. Ronald Engel. The Search for a Democratic Environmental Ethic. p. 4.

36 Ibid. p. 5.

37 Aldo Leopold. A Sand County Almanac. p. 221ff.

38 J. Ronald Engel. Ecology and Social Justice. p. 252.

39 Ibid. p. 252.

40 Ibid. p. 253.

41 A fuller description of the eight paradigms of the Ecological Democratic Faith can be found in J. Ronald Engel. Earth Spirituality is a Many-Splendored Thing. pp. 1-2.

42 J. Ronald Engel. The Search for a Democratic Environmental Ethic. p. 9.

43 Ibid. p. 15.

44 Ibid. p. 11.

45 Ibid. p. 12.

46 J. Ronald Engel. Earth Spirituality is a Many-Splendored Thing. p. 5.

47 Ibid. p. 6.

48 Ibid. p. 9.

49 Ibid. pp. 10-11.

50 J. Ronald Engel. The Faith of Democratic Ecological Citizenship. Nature, Polis, Ethics; Chicago Planning. A Hastings Center Report Special Supplement. November-December 1998. p. S31.

51 Ibid. p. S31.

52 Ibid. p. S32.

53 Ibid. p. S32.

54 Ibid. p. S32.

55 Ibid. p. S33.

56 Ibid. p. S34.

57 Ibid. p. S35.

58 Ibid. p. S36.

59 Ibid. p. S37.

60 Ibid. p. S38.

61 Ibid. p. S38.

62 Aldo Leopold. A Sand County Almanac. p. 224.

63 J. Ronald Engel. The Search for a Democratic Environmental Ethic. p. 18.

64 Ibid. p. 19.

65 Ibid. p. 25.

66 Ibid. p. 26.

67 Ibid. p. 17.

68 Ibid. p. 18.

69 Ibid. pp. 20-21.

70 J. Ronald Engel. The Search for a Democratic Environmental Ethic. p. 18.

71 Philip Selznick. Foundations of Communitarian Liberalism. In The Essential Communitarian Reader. Ed. Etzioni, Amitai. (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 1998) pp. 11-13.

72 Robert N. Bellah. Community Properly Understood: A Defense of "Democratic

Communitarianism" In The Essential Communitarian Reader. Ed. Etzioni, Amitai. (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 1998) p. 18.

73 Ibid. p. 17.

74 J. Ronald Engel. Introduction: The Ethics of Sustainable Development. In Ethics of Environment and Development. Eds. Engel, J. Ronald; Engel, Joan Gibb. (Tucson: University of Arizona, 1990) pp. 10-11

75 Ibid. p. 12.

76 Ibid. p. 19.