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Competing Visions of a Green World Order:  
Transatlantic Tensions over Environmental Governance

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*We shall require a substantially new manner of thinking if mankind is to survive.*  
~Albert Einstein

*I think the environment should be put in the category of our national security. Defense of our resources is just as important as defense abroad. Otherwise what is there to defend?*  
~Robert Redford, Yosemite National Park dedication, 1985

## **I. Introduction**

The literature on environmental citizenship has already established that fundamental changes in human consciousness and a restructuring of political institutions are necessary for a truly global environmental reform to take place. Not only do political actors need to reformulate the agenda of nation states and civil society groups but, even more importantly, individuals need to reach a new level of connectivity to their peers around the globe, not just through ideas, but also through genuine solidarity. The literature points to different avenues for achieving this, without a clear argument of where the global leadership on the issue lies, as well as what ought to be done concurrently on the institutional and personal level.

In trying to present a possible answer to this theoretical limitation, I focus on two entities, which have been largely responsible for the establishment and growth of the environmental movement and for putting the issue itself on the global agenda. One calls itself a state and the other is anything but a cohesive political entity in the Westphalian tradition. Moreover, because we talk about the environment, an issue which calls for the leadership of developed countries, looking at the two most powerful among them is critical. The United States of America and the European Union together comprise less than a sixth of the world population. Together, they account for more than two-thirds of the global GDP. They also contribute almost half of the current environmental degradation in the world, not accounting for the historic harm that their rapid industrialization has left to future generations.<sup>1</sup> This is why, looking comparatively at the United States and the EU within the context of the environment is the most convenient vantage point for a meaningful discussion of what environmental citizenship means and entails, and what it should be in order to succeed. This will provide valuable lessons not only for America but for the world as a whole, as the ramifications of the issue are undeniably global.

### *Central Premises and Main Argument*

I establish two premises which will support my main argument. First, I argue that true global citizenship is exercised by those who think beyond the notions of geopolitics and through the lens of biosphere politics. Saving our biosphere is a common problem for all countries and by far transcends immediate geopolitical concerns. This fundamental shift in understanding is critical both for institutions and citizens. Achieving it represents what Sigmund Freud calls the “third stage of human consciousness”, a connection with nature, rather than an adversarial relationship with it, which is also fostered by a sense of global empathy with peoples in places far away from one’s home and country.<sup>2</sup> In an illustration of the need for a paradigm shift on the individual and institutional levels, I examine the extent to which the US and Europe have moved towards biosphere politics, the quintessential question for each country in the present time.

Second, I view environmental citizenship (often construed as a bottom-up phenomenon) as profoundly grounded in and dependent on leadership (often misconceived as a top-down process). It is important to understand that citizenship cannot be divorced from leadership because no social, political, or economic movement of any considerable proportion in the entire history of humanity has been devoid of guiding vision and agency.

Citizenship derives its operational power from individuals (or institutions, or states) with ideas and purpose that are able to reach a convergence point between an objective and an existing structural circumstance. Only in this way they are able to drive others (whether in a bottom-up or top-down approach) to push boundaries and take action on issues that go against existing political, economic, or cultural conditions. Thus, I understand leadership as an exemplary model of institutional vision and action that demonstrates civic ambition and dedication and inspires other peoples and nations. And this is the fault line along which the US and Europe diverge.

My main argument is twofold. First, the European Union has emerged as the global environmental leader in terms of institutional willingness to act and depth of fundamental individual and collective values. America ought to follow and adopt some of the ideas promoted by Brussels because both Washington and environmental activists have failed to articulate and implement a broad vision for our common biosphere. The question then becomes how this divergence in environmental policy has emerged, particularly between two political entities so close in history, values, and principles. To answer this question, I look at the historical, institutional, and cultural fault lines that have shaped the European and American world views.

Secondly, from a normative perspective, America ought to transition to becoming a “green state”, not only on the institutional but also on the personal level.<sup>3</sup> Citizens should understand how critical the biosphere mentality is, and institutions ought to accept the issue as the central existential challenge to our world. In addition, both governments and citizens ought to move beyond the concept of the state as the field of environmental action and nurture a sense of global empathy and compassion not only for others today, but also for the future generations that will inherit the environmental challenge. Global empathy instead of self-interest, interrelatedness instead of entrenchment, inclusivity instead of suspicion, and constructive dialogue instead of intractable negation are some of the assets of the European leadership model. When coupled with American creativity, innovation and personal responsibility, these represent the intersection between vision and action that the environmental movement across the world vitally needs. The EU is ahead in achieving these “green state” principles, but often struggles with poor implementation and translation of rhetoric into action.

The paper is divided into three parts. I first examine the paths that have led humans in general and the US and Europe in particular in different directions on the environmental question. Here history reveals the various markers of difference. Second, I critically analyze the European and American experience in environmental leadership, highlighting the institutional and cultural disparities between the two, as well as the roots of Europe’s comparative advantage. At the same time, I also pay attention to the limitations of the European model. Last, I look into the future and try to offer some normative ideas about ways in which America could become a green state, espousing a hybrid vision of environmental citizenship which transcends the familiar national borders and borrows from the European experience.

## **II. Historical Canvass**

### *The Human Persona*

At the beginning of known history, in the conditions of hunter-gatherer societies, humans used to have a strong connection to nature, both physical and spiritual. Some remnants of that can still be seen among hunter-gatherer societies in the Amazon region. There was a relationship with harmony between people and their environments to the extent that in many traditions deities were associated with forces of nature. The development of

agriculture pushed human consciousness into a new paradigm. Once animals and plants began to be domesticated for production, the link between humans and nature weakened.

This triggered a fundamental shift in the relationship, which transformed into a new dominant paradigm. Since the Enlightenment, humans have defined themselves as creatures of reason and order in constant struggle with nature, the unknown, dangerous, life-threatening reality outside one's self. One's autonomy and freedom was defined by a sense of control and domination over the forces outside us, that is, nature and its unwieldy power. Moreover, one defined himself also in opposition to his fellow peers in a Hobbesian world characterized by painful and uncertain existence where life is "ugly, brutish and short" and power and self-interest govern human interactions.<sup>4</sup>

In the new age of globalization and technological boom, a new paradigm shift in the relationships between individuals is imminent. The individual has increasingly become torn between the array of relationships in his life, which stretch from relations in real-time, as well as connections through the plethora of media avenues that surround us. As Kenneth Gergen (2004) argues, individuals today are "giving over bits and pieces of their persona to each new relationship just to stay engaged in all of the networks that surround them".<sup>5</sup> Jeremy Rifkin (2004) adds, "if being propertied and enjoying autonomy and exclusivity was the *sine qua non* of the American Dream, having access and being embedded [in a social network] is the much sought-after goal in the new era."<sup>6</sup> As a result, when the individual reaches this new level of consciousness, self-autonomy as the central objective of one's existence is replaced by the value of his relationships with others and the relationships that make up a complex world. This ultimately leads the individual to understand better the variety of ways in which humans are related in the world (thus developing a strong sense of empathy for the other), a critical prerequisite for true environmental citizenship as one of the central determinants of global citizenship. This imminent social paradigm shift is the soil on which more visionary and effective environmental citizenship can grow. This is also, I would argue, the fledgling mentality of Europe, and to a large extent the US still resides within the old conceptions of human interaction. I will analyze this in more detail when looking at the European and US mentality and its cultural and historical roots. At the outset, however, it is critical to look at the conditions at hand that have and continue to shape environmental policy on each side of the Atlantic.

#### *Historical Evolution of Environmental Awareness in the US and EU*

It is important to understand that among the major global challenges of the current moment, the environment was one of the latest arrivals. Hence it is still far from being completely accepted and understood. The issue (re)emerged in the 1960s and was first addressed by the United States. America began to realize the human impact on the environment and the dire effects that the problem could have in the long run. Even though in the US the environmental movement and the federal institutions are separate entities, they are fundamentally interdependent and historically have moved on parallel tracks vis-à-vis the main environmental questions. For example, in the 1960s and 70s, activists and public opinion pressured government to pass a number of vital laws including the Clean Water and Air acts. Environmental issues were largely non-partisan and there were bipartisan agreements on the principle challenges. State policy began to focus on ways to reduce consumption and limit carbon emissions, thus slowing the process of degradation and preserving biodiversity. The US also led global efforts on the issue, assisting in the organization of the first environmental summit at Stockholm in 1972 under the auspices of the UN.

However, in the 1980s and 1990s, these policies were gradually abandoned, and a period of retrenchment followed because the US was once again concerned with its own

economic growth (as a result of the recessions of the 1980s). On one hand, activists became complacent and arrogant after the early successes in the previous decades. On the other hand, institutions were no longer obliged to respond to public pressure on the environment, especially in the face of the immediate economic problems. The White House was hardly focusing on the environment, since productivity, job creation, and income were on the top of the agenda. The new Republican socio-economic coalition focused on economic conservatism and emphasized the omnipotence of the market in solving economic problems. The old belief that concern for the environment and economic growth are mutually exclusive resurfaced in official rhetoric. Throughout the 1990s, President Clinton tried to address the issue domestically and through international multilateral institutions, but animosity with Congress thwarted most of his initiatives and, as Shellenberger and Nordhaus explain, the environmental movement was relegated to merely another public interest group in DC<sup>7</sup>.

This brief period of renewed concern abated with the election of President Bush in 2000. As a traditional conservative, he was not only primarily focused on sustaining the economic power of the US, but overall the environment failed to seriously enter the Republican agenda. At the same time, the events of 9/11 fundamentally shifted US policy interests and created a new period of retrenchment on the issue, coupled with animosity towards traditional European allies and international organizations, especially within the context of the war in Iraq. Hence, institutional leadership at the highest level is still lacking from the world's leading economy and most significant military power.

Meanwhile, the fledgling European Union, established with the Treaty of Rome in 1957, was never seriously considering the issue of the environment, especially because it was within the powers of various member states and could not be addressed as a Union concern. It was not until the 1987 Single European Act that the institutional makeup of the EU was sufficiently altered to allow for environmental policy to be addressed entirely on the European level.<sup>8</sup> As a result, the EU began to formulate a common environmental policy, which was completely removed from national control through the 1992 Treaty of Maastricht.<sup>9</sup>

Particularly since Maastricht, the EU has voiced its strong support for the principle of sustainable development both domestically and internationally, even though reluctance vis-à-vis new environmental policies followed periods of European internal struggles. Most recently, the Union articulated a comprehensive climate and energy policy as a response to growing concerns about climate change. The ambitious agenda includes cutting greenhouse gas emissions by 20%, producing 20% of necessary energy from renewable resources, and increasing energy efficiency by 20%, all by 2020. The proposal has been opposed by national industries and environmental activists alike, as the former see it as too interventionist and the latter – as insufficiently ambitious. Nevertheless, in the words of Commission President Manuel Barroso, this is “the most far reaching set of legislative proposals to be made by the European Commission in many years”. He continues, “[Europe] will show how a modern economy can be designed to meet the challenge. This is sustainable development in action”.<sup>10</sup> This is what a bold, yet reasonable, vision for the future looks like, and its implementation is likely since it also takes into account economic and political constraints.

Abroad, under the influence of increasingly conclusive information about climate change, the Union has pushed for multilateral agreements on cutting greenhouse emissions through concrete limits and timetables at each international environmental summit. Even though the single voice of the EU on global environmental issues is a function of its internal cohesion as a political entity, the Commission has managed to articulate a single European position on issues like climate change, biodiversity, and hazardous waste. Of course this does not preclude the existence of elaborate national environmental policies in various member states, which are, however, coordinated with the central authorities in Brussels.

The EU resolve has often been blocked by American skepticism and reluctance to engage into regulation for fear of serious economic costs. Overall, the adversarial relationship between the two economic giants in the area of the environment has revealed a deep division which has been conditioned by both institutional and cultural underpinnings. While the EU has remained an advocate for sustainable development and a commitment primarily by developed countries to cut greenhouse emissions, the US has continued to oppose any multilateral treaties that do not include the fast-growing developing states (primarily China and India) or seem to burden excessively (as determined by Washington policymakers) the American economy.

### **III. Contrasting Perspectives on the Environment**

#### *Institutional Makeup*

A comprehensive overview of the American and European action in the field of the environment demands a careful analysis of the different institutional structures of the two aspiring “green giants”.<sup>11</sup> The decision-making mechanisms on each side of the Atlantic have strongly conditioned the environmental agenda both in terms of rhetoric and action. While both are considered dynamic political entities, the European Union has undergone a much more intensive and accelerated transformation in the past sixty years. The EU is not a superstate, and has a limited mandate over policies outside the purview of its member states. In fact, the entire European project has been the result of multilateral negotiations and bargaining, resulting into significant pooling of sovereignty between a diverse group of nations (already 27). In contrast, the US, though also a relatively recent political project, is a single nation-state that has clear guiding principles and powers at each level of government (federal, state, local) and is no longer in a state of flux in terms of its identity and institutional structure. This underlying difference between the EU and America leads to several concrete divergences in the conception and implementation of environmental policy.

First, the EU, by its own design, relies much more heavily than the US on international organizations and multilateral avenues for solving global issues. Contrastingly, the notions of freedom, sovereignty and independence are deeply rooted in the US, which condition the country’s uneasiness when acting in concert with other states on the international arena. This difference partially justifies the fundamental disagreements between Europeans and Americans over global environmental policy and any multilateral binding agreement. Examples of these stretch back to the Rio Conference in 1992 and have continued through the 1997 Kyoto Protocol, reaching the recent tensions at the 2007 Global Summit in Bali. At each of these fora, the US has remained reticent about concrete commitments, reluctant to accept timelines and requirements for cutting greenhouse emissions.

Second, the European Union has included the principle of sustainable development within its official policies, requiring a number of sectors, from transport and agriculture to industry and tourism, to adopt it in their practices. In this way, the EU has been constantly involved in the direct implementation of environmental policy, often interfering in the workings of the market. As Knill argues, “EU environmental policy is much more than an ad hoc collection of individual measures.”<sup>12</sup> There is, he claims, an underlying policy on the environment rooted into common European cultural and historic values, as will become clear in the following section. Contrastingly, the US has tended to rely more on market forces than strong regulation. This has not only been a product of the beliefs of particular presidents (Reagan and Bush – father and son), but it is a belief that reflects the tissue of the American spirit of independence and self-reliance. This has prevented Washington from articulating a bold and broad environmental vision that translates into particular policy implementation.

Third, partisan divisions over the environment are much more acute in America than in Europe. This largely stems from the absence of a clear consensus on the issue among all levels of government. Republicans have become increasingly conservative on the topic, refusing to allow for environmental regulation and claiming that it would reduce the competitiveness and strength of the US economy. At the same time, the past twenty years have seen only a single brief period (1993-1994) when the same party had control of both the legislative and executive branches. This has made it harder to promote international and domestic environmental initiatives which have to pass through the US Senate with a wide majority, a feat often impossible to achieve. There is no such issue on the other side of the Atlantic, where the environment has been accepted as a priority by all parties and leaders in the Union. The topic has unified the European Parliament, forcing the European Commission to seriously engage the issue and propose concrete solutions, while working in concert with the non-governmental sector. Meanwhile, the majority of civil society profoundly supports action on the environment, pushing both NGOs and governments to act both on a national and continental level.<sup>13</sup>

This also explains the fourth major difference as far as institutions. In Europe, the NGO sector is much more tightly related to the government than in America. In fact, NGOs in Brussels are granted consultancy status and are directly subsidized by the European Commission. In this way, a major part of civil society is strongly supported by government, works closely with it, while retaining independence and a strong voice for lobbying and protection of various interests. This is particularly true for the environmental NGOs. The European Environmental Bureau, an umbrella of more than 160 environmental NGOs, has been created and directly subsidized by the European Commission.<sup>14</sup> This notwithstanding, proposals and policy are also crafted by more traditional transnational actors such as the European Environmental Advisory Councils. In contrast, the United States relies on a clear separation between government and NGOs to the extent that the latter are not only perceived as external forces in Washington but are often engaged in an adversarial relationship with government, whether it is the legislative or the executive branch.

Finally, activists in the US have pointed out the arrogance and complacency that ensued among environmentalists after the initial legislative victories in the 1970s. Their focus on specific issue areas is too narrow and falls prey to stronger lobbies and special interests in Washington. Mihael Shellenberger and Ted Nordhaus expose this reality in a compelling argument in *The Death of Environmentalism: Global Warming Politics in a Post-Environmental World*. The authors claim that the obsolete strategies of the US environmental movement have undermined its power, particularly in the challenging environment since the advent of the Bush Administration. Shellenberger and Nordhaus continue:

But in their public campaigns, not one of America's environmental leaders is articulating a vision of the future commensurate with the magnitude of the crisis. Instead they are promoting technical policy fixes like pollution controls and higher vehicle mileage standards – proposals that provide neither the popular inspiration nor the political alliances the community needs to deal with the problem.<sup>15</sup>

In other words, the piecemeal approach to the environment has almost doomed the movement in the US, and while old achievements continue to fuel the self-assurance of many activists, the times have fundamentally changed. As the authors show, in the last twenty years the US has not passed a single piece of domestic or international legislation of significant consequence – similar to the Clean Air or Clean Water Acts of the 1970s – that provides a

step forward in seriously tackling the environmental challenge. Hence, they see the need for a fundamental paradigmatic shift in the mentality of American activists and, as a result, in their messages and actions, in order to make citizens and institutions alike realize the full scope of the existential threat of environmental degradation as a whole. While some changes in citizen action have appeared since Shellenberger and Nordhaus' 2005 article, the change in rhetoric has not percolated through the entire civil society and the main institutional stakeholders.

In this context, the institutions of the EU, while still fragile and weak, have overtaken the US in global environmental leadership. This is manifested in rhetoric on sustainable development, internal political consensus about the importance of the environment, and efforts to articulate a new environmental agenda both among the member states and globally. Europe's example is an appropriate model for America if it seeks to reclaim its central position in the global environmental conversation. Certainly, the US is essential for addressing global warming due to its sheer size and impact, but it is no longer the power that shapes the principles and agenda behind environmental reform. Hence a look across the Atlantic could give Washington a clue as to how it could regain a more positive discourse and attention to the environment globally but also on the domestic arena. However, an explanation of the growing gap between European and American leadership is also grounded in the cultural underpinnings of both societies.

### *Culture and Values*

Scholars agree that the US and Europe's environmental policies, previously aligned in principle and approach, have recently diverged.<sup>16</sup> This has also been reflected in the citizens' awareness and response to the problem. Indeed, Americans and Europeans tend to perceive the environment question differently, and the roots of this often unexpected reality are grounded in deep historical and cultural disparities. They help in understanding both the institutional divergence that I outlined, as well as the asymmetry of awareness and action among citizens. Granted, the generalizations that I will make in this section could not be applied universally, but I argue that their validity is nonetheless important.

When looking at environmental citizenship in the US, it is critical to discuss elements of the American psyche, in particular the frontier mentality which still defines the country and the ideas of individualism and consumption. When the first European settlers arrived in the New World, they discovered a harsh landscape, insecurity from natural (and human) threats, great potential for wealth but also great danger for survival and subsistence. In a land where brutish lifestyle and draconian action and sacrifice defined one's existence and success, the individual was put in opposition to native inhabitants and the forces of nature which could easily destroy him at the frontier. Bringing with themselves the tenants of the Enlightenment, many of the European settlers who first moved to the US applied the ideas of domination over the unruly natural world as a determinant of one's personality and one's concrete chances for survival and progress. Overall, the frontier mentality has deep roots in every aspect of American culture and institutions and provides perhaps the biggest marker of difference between the Europeans who stayed and those who left to the New World.

Closely tied to this idea, individualism stems from the teachings of Luther and Calvin in Europe, but it truly expanded in meaning in the lands of the New World. One's self is defined not only by one's personal relationship to God, but also by one's autonomy and mobility, which embody the "go-it-alone" mentality at the frontier. It is important to understand that there is nothing inherent in this quintessentially American characteristic. It was partly shaped by the religious and cultural particularities of the European settlers and then conditioned by the harsh existence in the new land, which required qualities such as independence, persistence, and a clear sense of "mine versus thine" in an uncertain and

adversarial world. Thus, the teachings of Thomas Hobbes and John Locke took a much deeper root in the US, rather than in Europe and have proven resistant to change ever since.<sup>17</sup>

Consumerism is also deeply embedded in the American tradition, and its roots go back to both the particular tenants of Protestantism and the immediate reality in the New World, but its full impact followed the expansion of industrialization and market capitalism. Americans are the biggest consumers of natural resources in the world. The US uses up more than one third of the Earth's energy even though it has only 5% of the world population. The implications of such irresponsible consumption have been far-reaching, but its intimate relation to the American "way of life" has discouraged popular drive for environmental reforms. It is clear that changes at the institutional level are necessary but insufficient for the US to reduce its energy consumption and foster true environmental citizenship as long as consumption levels in society remain high. This demonstrates the critical importance of personal choice and action, the essence of true global citizenship.

Conversely, the US culture of personal accountability and responsibility could be a helpful tool for developing personal ethics vis-à-vis the environment. Grounded in the protestant tradition and one's personal obligations before the afterlife, this has created an ethics of hard work and dedication to any enterprise. A sizable number of Americans have used these intrinsic values to advocate for environmental reform, galvanize the powers of civil society and pressure policymakers to adopt the legislative measures for bringing the US back to leadership in the environmental arena. The challenge remains to change the mentality of the majority, people who still live in the previous level of consciousness, where the individual and national self-interest trump any consideration for a truly global ethics and empathy for people across the world. As Shellenberger and Nordhaus explain:

Environmentalists are in a culture war whether we like it or not. It's a war over our core values as Americans and over our vision for the future, and it won't be won by appealing to the rational consideration of our collective self-interest.<sup>18</sup>

At the same time, the entrepreneurial spirit, innovation and creativity that have transformed the US into the strongest single economy in the world could be the tools for translating the vital mentality shift into concrete action. Shellenberger and Nordhaus use venture capitalists as a model that environmentalists ought to adopt because inaction is worse than action that has failed. While technology is unlikely to singlehandedly resolve environmental degradation and stop global warming, when coupled with a particular worldview among citizens and governments, it can certainly move environmental citizenship to a new level of accomplishment on a global, rather than national level. This is where America's comparative advantage lies, and its potential for leadership resides.

For Europeans the principles of inclusivity, the primacy of human rights, and a level of market restraint at the expense of individual freedom are central. The importance of collective responsibility and the compassion towards the other trump the focus on individualism and competition. One's existence is profoundly grounded in one's relationship to others within a large social network that provides more equality and more interdependence than in the US. This is reflected not only in the European social model but also in the personal relationships of assistance and solidarity among Europeans of different backgrounds.<sup>19</sup> Hence, the respect to the environment is also deeper, as the citizen's mentality is concerned with the welfare and interest of others, and those are intimately tied to the environment. Moreover, when discussing growth and progress, the EU, much more than the US, tends to refer to the ideas of sustainable development and a responsible use of resources. Research into alternative energy sources has received a warmer welcome than in Washington.

Fifty-six percent of Europeans say “it is necessary to fundamentally change our way of life and development if we want to halt the deterioration of the environment”.<sup>20</sup> This shows a clear commitment on the civil society level to a vision for the indivisibility of the Earth and the transnational nature of the issue.

In this context, Europe is ahead of the US in claiming the moral high ground and reaching the third level of consciousness that Freud describes. After all, it is important to remember that the EU itself has largely emerged as the first transnational political network, transcending the traditional notions of politics and power embedded in the human psyche after Westphalia. It is a political system where no single player dominates the network, and everyone has the right to some input and a portion of the output. The challenge then remains for the new generation of Europeans to turn the moral principles that govern the EU into more concrete action. Unlike the American model of individualism and autonomy, which has resisted the challenges of time regardless of the circumstances, the European political model and its foundations are fragile and have not been proven against internal and external challenges. Nevertheless, the moral potential for moving from inter-state power struggles (geopolitics) to inter-state cooperation in defense of our common natural resources (biosphere politics) is there, and as Eckersley recognizes, the European Union gives us the hope that a true transnational democracy is possible as the major tool for generating environmental citizenship.<sup>21</sup> He continues, “At present, the European Union represents perhaps the closest real world approximation of a green Kantian or post-Westphalian culture”.<sup>22</sup> However, it is uncertain how far such a culture is likely to spread internationally, where moral persuasion more often takes a back seat to coercion and self-interest in interstate negotiations.

#### *Waking up to the Reality*

Europe has managed to carry out a paradigm shift of policies, implementing regulation through neoliberal strategies that target sustainable development. It has also educated aware and involved citizens that predominantly consider the environment a central concern for the continent and beyond. Brussels is unified behind the concept of ecological modernization, that the environment and the economy are *not* engaged in a zero-sum relationship, but rather, growth and development can be achieved while preserving high environmental standards.<sup>23</sup> This concept is still questioned in the US, which limits the power of the environmental message. This has put the EU into a position of leadership globally, offering a model of growth that has the environment as its central concern and a notion of morality that perceives all humans a part of a common biosphere with no regard to borders and difference.

At the same time, it is important to recognize that aside from its guiding moral principles, the EU environmental policy is primarily the result of functional logic. It is based not on some fundamental grand design, but rather, on a number of actions that have coalesced into an increasingly comprehensive and independent policy field within the Union framework. This does not mean that the EU’s environmental policy is a fortuitous coincidence but recognizes that Brussels is not always concerned with the long term. Moreover, many European countries have a long way to go before they successfully complete the environmental modernization project, especially as former communist republics with subprime environmental standards have entered the Union. Nevertheless, the beginning has already been set by countries in Scandinavia, and Western Europe, and Brussels is unlikely to let the newcomers dilute this common priority.

Notwithstanding the compelling and persuasive European environmental rhetoric, the reality remains that consumption and pollution levels in the EU are not significantly lower than in the US. Moreover, despite the success of environmental regulatory competition between European states, the implementation of these policies and their harmonization with

EU-level principles has been notoriously inefficient. Indeed, the EU possesses a strong cultural and institutional connection to the issue of the environment, but there is still a stark discrepancy between rhetoric and action in terms of concrete reductions in emissions or moderation of personal consumption. This intent-action gap ought to be tackled with the joint efforts of Brussels and civil society, borrowing some of the research and innovation that characterize the American experience. Nonetheless, as Vig and Faure assert, “the commitment to the idea of sustainable development is playing an important role in defining the identity of the EU, both internally and externally, and in legitimizing the entire European integration project.” They continue

It also allows the EU [to lead] as a normative power (as opposed to military power) in international politics... a major difference with the US. Thus, despite limited policy achievements to date, it can be argued that the declaratory values of the EU will put it on an increasingly divergent course with the US in the future.<sup>24</sup>

I would like to examine the last claim that Vig and Faure propose, which suggests a long path of divergence between the US and the EU. In my view, this would be disastrous for the global environmental agenda. From a normative perspective, only convergence between the two cultural and governance models can lead to the formation of viable environmental citizenship on a global level.

#### **IV. Space for Convergence: A Normative Perspective**

At the end of the paper, I will offer some normative ideas about the notion of environmental citizenship as well as the particular ways in which it can be operationalized through a hybrid Euro-American approach, taking the best practices from each side of the Atlantic. At the outset, I will reiterate that environmental citizenship is not a national phenomenon and cannot be defined within the borders of a particular state. In fact, I would argue that in order to fully grasp the notion of environmental citizenship and the conditions necessary for its evolution within the human psyche, we need a fundamentally new lens through which to look at some basic political concepts.

First, we ought to develop a new notion of what the state means. Indeed, the familiar Westphalian paradigm that divides the world into closed nation states, each pursuing its own political and economic interest, is no longer suitable to analyze intrinsically global challenges and gear leadership to biosphere politics. The environment is not divided into states; it does not obey artificial political or economic boundaries, nor does it reflect social inequalities. This is a problem for all humans, of every walk of life, every race, ethnicity, religion, and social class. This is an issue that is bigger than the petty, socially constructed differences that humans have cultivated amongst each other for thousands of years. This is an issue which ought to unite us, because there is no more worthy environments and less worthy ones, poorer and richer ones, black or white ones, Muslim or Christian ones....there is one environment and a single biosphere in which we live. Thus, if we accept this basic premise, that the environment is at its core a transnational challenge that transcends other differences between humans, then we have to discover a new political framework, different from the state, through which people can engage in true environmental citizenship.

As Eckersley argues, if states begin to cooperate within a new Kantian, post-Westphalian system, the chances for genuine environmental cooperation and multilateralism are greatly augmented (251). No longer can states afford to operate within the familiar

Hobbesian paradigm of chaos, confrontation and raw individual interest. In order to seriously tackle problems like climate change and global warming, a fundamental paradigm shift is necessary. I see a day when governments view their actions within a global context, and ordinary citizens develop a sense of profound empathy for other humans who are facing the same long term challenges triggered by environmental degradation.

Second, it is necessary that there emerges a “hybrid” approach to environmental citizenship grounded in the European values of inclusivity, cooperation and solidarity but conditioned by the critical American attributes of personal accountability and responsibility. The commitment to sustainable development and the civil society and wide government support that exist in Europe ought to blend with the entrepreneurial, creative spirit of America. Market forces alone cannot solve the issue, but the European tradition of community, inclusivity and strong government involvement seem the appropriate counterparts of the American model, holding the potential to bring environmental citizenship to the fore of the international arena, not just through rhetoric, but also with concrete avenues for action. This will help America create a new environmental narrative grounded in empathy for the entire human race and our shared natural world.

The reality of environmental degradation demands that the entire world should be the guardian of our biosphere and no single continent can completely rectify the current situation. Hence, the complementarity of the American and European civic mentalities and government models is the most appropriate approach to fostering people’s global consciousness, individual responsibility and accountability, as well as the necessary leadership among politicians and civil society for the engagement in genuine and effective environmental citizenship. Such well-balanced mechanism has the potential to deliver results and quickly attract the attention and commitment of the rest of the world.

## **V. Conclusion**

I have attempted to lay out a new vision for environmental citizenship by searching for a qualitatively different model of human mentality and leadership in transcending geopolitics and accepting biosphere politics as the *modus operandi* of the future. There are two underlying premises of the argument: global citizenship requires a fundamental paradigmatic shift beyond geopolitics, and environmental citizenship is inherently grounded in the notion of leadership. With this preliminary conceptual canvass in place, I offered a comparative study of the European and American environmental policies, as they relate to the particular culture and institutions residing on each side of the Atlantic. Throughout the past decade, it has become evident that global leadership on environmental issues currently resides in Europe, a claim that the literature fails to make. Europe’s moral and cultural principles complement the US culture of innovation and accountability. However, it is also clear that the US has lost its global leadership on the issue because it fails to articulate a coherent vision about the future grounded in fundamental values of human empathy and compassion and a harmonious relation with nature. The fundamental difference between environmental activists and institutions on the two sides of the Atlantic stems from the deep historic and cultural markers that have shaped the American and European experience.

As a result, new global consciousness among citizens and within institutions should be cultivated for the formation of genuine empathy that bounds us on the issue of the environment. Moreover, there are important lessons that leaders in American government and civil society can extract from the European experience in terms of cultural and institutional particularities. However, it will take leadership by individuals and groups to make this step and look beyond the domestic for clues on solving an intrinsically global problem.

In conclusion, I have tried to use what we already have as two of the most successful models of governance and civil consciousness to offer a new model of environmental citizenship that can have global application. Granted, this is merely one view of an extremely complex and politically loaded issue, and yet, within the current mentality of nation states, political and economic division, and entrenched individual allegiances, the environment can hardly receive the attention and serious commitment it deserves, not simply within national borders, but on a global level. A new paradigm of political and personal identity ought to be coupled with a clear leadership vision among institutions and individuals, in order to elevate the bits and pieces of environmental action and commitment that we have now into a genuine environmental citizenship for our single, common biosphere.

## Notes

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- <sup>1</sup> Vig, Norman J. and Faure, Michael G. (2004). *Green Giants? Environmental Policies of the United States and the European Union*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.
- <sup>2</sup> Rifkin, Jeremy. (2004). *The European Dream: How Europe's Vision of the Future is Quietly Eclipsing the American Dream*. Cambridge: Polity. p. 370.
- <sup>3</sup> Eckersley, Robyn. (2004). *The Green State: Rethinking Democracy and Sovereignty*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.
- <sup>4</sup> Hobbes, Thomas. *The Leviathan*.
- <sup>5</sup> Gergen, Kenneth J. (1991). *The Saturated Self: Dilemmas of Identity in Contemporary Life* New York: Basic Books.
- <sup>6</sup> Rifkin, Jeremy. (May 9, 2007). *Schuman Lecture 2007: The European Dream*. 3<sup>rd</sup> Forum Maastricht Conference: Europe, the Big Absentee? Striving to Realize its Potential. Maastricht University, The Netherlands.
- <sup>7</sup> Shellenberger, Michael and Nordhaus, Ted. (2005). The Death of Environmentalism: Global Warming Politics in a Post-environmental World". *Grist Magazine*. 13 January, 2005.
- <sup>8</sup> European Union (1987). Single European Act. Full Text: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/en/treaties/index.htm#other>.
- <sup>9</sup> European Union. (1992). Treaty of Maastricht. Full Text: <http://www.eurotreaties.com/maastrichttext.html>.
- <sup>10</sup> EU Unveils comprehensive Climate and Energy Package. (23 January, 2008). *EU Observer Online*. Retrieved February 21, 2007, from <http://euobserver.com/?aid=25513>
- <sup>11</sup> Vig, Norman J. and Faure, Michael G. (2004). *Green Giants? Environmental Policies of the United States and the European Union*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.
- <sup>12</sup> Knill, Christoph. (2007). *Environmental Politics in the European Union: Policy-making, Implementation, and Patterns of Multi-level Governance*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- <sup>13</sup> In December 2007, Eurobarometer executed a survey about Europeans' attitudes towards the issue of biodiversity. Almost seven out of ten people considered the loss of natural life as a *very serious global* problem and only 43% considered it a crucial domestic issue. Moreover, 61% saw the preservation of biodiversity as predominantly a *moral* issue. Sixty-seven percent said that they had personally made some efforts to preserve biodiversity, while more than half of the surveyed expressed willingness to do more. Once again, this proves the awareness and breadth of perspective among European citizens on environmental issues.
- <sup>14</sup> Vig, Norman J. and Faure, Michael G. (2004). *Green Giants? Environmental Policies of the United States and the European Union*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.
- <sup>15</sup> Shellenberger, Michael and Nordhaus, Ted. (2005). The Death of Environmentalism: Global Warming Politics in a Post-environmental World". *Grist Magazine*. 13 January, 2005.
- <sup>16</sup> *Ibid*.

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<sup>17</sup> Rifkin, Jeremy. (May 9, 2007). *Schuman Lecture 2007: The European Dream*. 3<sup>rd</sup> Forum Maastricht Conference: Europe, the Big Absentee? Striving to Realize its Potential. Maastricht University, The Netherlands.

<sup>18</sup> Shellenberger, Michael and Nordhaus, Ted. (2005). "The Death of Environmentalism: Global Warming Politics in a Post-environmental World". *Grist Magazine*. 13 January, 2005.

<sup>19</sup> A November 2007 Eurobarometer survey shows that almost three-quarters of EU citizens believe that people from different cultures enrich their countries, and 83% agreed about the benefits of intercultural contacts.

<sup>20</sup> Rifkin, Jeremy. (2004). *The European Dream: How Europe's Vision of the Future is Quietly Eclipsing the American Dream*. Cambridge: Polity.

<sup>21</sup> Eickersley, Robyn. (2004). *The Green State: Rethinking Democracy and Sovereignty*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

<sup>22</sup> Immanuel Kant's *Perpetual Peace* essay is considered as one of the ideological foundations of the European Union. In a way, Kant provides a reply to Hobbes' view of human interactions, stressing the possibility for perpetual peace grounded in cooperation, common interest, and mutual understanding by individuals (and states). *Ibid.*, p. 251.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 72.

<sup>24</sup> Vig, Norman J. and Faure, Michael G. (2004). *Green Giants? Environmental Policies of the United States and the European Union*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press. p. 362.

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