

# Introduction

## *The Path Ahead*

WE HAVE BEEN TAUGHT THAT DEMOCRACY began in ancient Greece, in Athens, when the world was several thousand years newer, and our species – *Homo sapiens* – was several thousand years younger. But how many of us know much more than that about democracy's birth or have given much thought to how such knowledge might be relevant or useful to us today? We have been told and, through our multiplicity of nation-states in the United Nations, we have agreed, that we aspire as a species to something called "sustainable development." But how many of us have truly considered how we can attain this aspiration and what attaining it will entail in societal transformation and in the passage of one human age into another? What is more, how many of us have reflected on the relationship between democracy and sustainable development, and on how that relationship may be central to the hopes of those of us who, in the face of unprecedented challenges in a seemingly ungovernable world, seek, and are striving to create democratic global governance and sustainable development? These are the subjects of the pages that follow, and these are the questions whose answers have inspired the proposals set out in the last several chapters of these pages.

An overriding question in all that follows is: Can there ever be such a thing as "democratic global governance," or is that lofty and ever-elusive concept doomed forever to remain an oxymoron? The web of international institutions and other international arrangements we have created, and on which we depend, are, to say the least, less than democratic. Their legitimacy is derived from a mixed bag of sovereign nation-states that are, in many instances, also less than democratic. Democracy exists in the world; but it is, in many places, less than it used to be; in most

places less than it could be; and, in all places, less than it should be. And in no place in the world is there much of any thought that genuine global governance is possible, much less than it could be democratic. There seem reasons aplenty all around us to conclude that “democratic global governance” is destined to remain an oxymoron.

To a limited extent, there is today what we can call “global governance.” There are established ways in which, despite the divisions in the world, we strive to find global solutions to global problems. Yet this current extent of global governance is considerably less than effective in meeting the challenges of a complex world increasingly confronting what could soon become an existential crisis. A principal reason for the overall ineffectiveness of our current forms of international cooperation is that the participation, direct and indirect, of billions of people throughout the world is largely missing in deciding what we must do. There is an urgent need now for much more – and for much more focused and much more effective – worldwide human cooperation to achieve our economic, environmental, and social goals of global sustainable development for all. Yet, try as we may, this level and this quality of cooperation cannot be attained without also making governance at every level – including the global – more participatory and thus more democratic.<sup>1</sup> And making democracy all it must become will be possible only if we also attain sustainable development. Democracy is not possible without sustainable development, and sustainable development is not possible without democracy.

The “Great Enrichment”<sup>2</sup> of the human world since the Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution has led – despite the world’s many remaining and, in many places, increasing inequities – not only to an unprecedented level of overall economic prosperity but also to a “Great Acceleration”<sup>3</sup> of humanity’s impact on the natural world through production, consumption, and fossil fuel energy use, especially since the end of World War II in 1945. Today, we live in a world of accelerating and ceaseless change, a world in which, every day, change threatens more and more to overwhelm us, including especially the unnatural changes we humans have made and are stubbornly still making in the natural world. It is a world in which we are realizing, slowly and belatedly, that the human world and the natural world are one and the same. Some of

the tools we have made, and the ways we have made them, are eroding the very foundations of human civilization and endangering the very future of our planet.

We live within a “technosphere” of our making that in turn exists within a biosphere we are unmaking, and our limited vision is preventing us from seeing how we might live and prosper in some other – in some sustainable – way.<sup>4</sup> We need new ways of seeing and acting that are grounded in and proceed from this current reality and that will shape and reshape the ways we try to live together and work together with the oneness of humanity and nature constantly in mind. The multiplying threats from climate change, biodiversity loss, pandemics, and other planetary changes caused by the mistakes and the spreading footprint of humanity, carbon and otherwise, are all upon us. They have assailed us in a concatenation of alarming events. The impacts of these changes are worsened by our continuing insistence on minimizing those events, on refusing to cooperate to address what is causing them, and on debasing each other, oppressing each other, and slaughtering each other in wars and in other violent conflicts that are the consequence of our proven penchant for self-destruction.

These threats can only be met by making something new. That something new must be made through much more worldwide democratic participation, starting at the “grass roots” of the world and building up. Without much more extensive democratic participation than exists now throughout the world, and at every level of governance, there will not be sufficient popular support for the kind of new that is needed. Without much broader and deeper popular support, the necessary new ways of shaping how we live within the world cannot be created. If decisions about how best to do this essential shaping are not made in a way that is fully democratic, then the best decisions will not be made, the best results will not be achieved, and one of two eventualities will follow. Either decisions will not be made at all, as seems likely on our current course, leaving civilization confronting the prospect of chaos and collapse on a hotter and more precarious planet; or decisions will be made, but not democratically, and will be imposed by undemocratic powers from above, leaving people everywhere in the clutches of coercion, trapped in a dark new world, and shorn of what semblance of control they may currently have over their lives and their futures.

Broad popular participation in governance at every level is essential to prevent such a grim future by achieving the global sustainable development all the members of the United Nations have said they seek. Such a breadth and depth of participation cannot be imposed from the top down; it must come from the bottom up. To a great extent, it must emerge from and be inspired by the starting up and the scaling up of the cumulative endeavors of a vast array of self-organized local and regional networks of democratic participation for sustainable development throughout the world. Some of these networks involve and engage governments. Others are innovative examples of “governance without government.”<sup>5</sup> All are examples of a new kind of participatory democracy that offers a way forward through multiple channels and levels of human self-governance that are not readily accessible through traditional means of governance, even in most democracies.<sup>6</sup>

Efforts must continue worldwide to renew and revitalize democratic governance where it exists and to institute it where it does not, at every level of human endeavor. It matters immensely whether people can elect those who would lead them and whether they can later remove those they elect. It matters equally whether they have a genuine right to criticize those who would govern them. It matters whether their governance is transparent and whether their leaders are accountable to the people. It matters whether the law is written to apply to all equally and whether all are treated equally under the law. Yet these procedural fundamentals of liberal democracy will not alone suffice at any level of governance. Not today. Not in the face of all that everywhere confronts us.

To succeed today, and tomorrow, these basic democratic procedures must be accompanied and encouraged by new forms of democratic expression, including many that are outside the traditional realms of democratic participation. Democracy must become more than merely voting every now and then. It must acquire animating substance. It must become a way of life. In making this happen, in transforming, enhancing, and strengthening democracy so that we can meet the challenges of a world in the grip of an unfolding existential crisis for humanity, these new forms of democratic expression must draw for inspiration and emulation on the actions of the participatory democratic initiatives for

sustainable development everywhere emerging and on display at the grass roots of the world.

In their search for sustainable development, these grassroots innovations in democratic participation not only can help us progress toward sustainable development where many governments, democratic and not, have so far failed; they can also help kindle the reform of institutions and other arrangements of governance at every level to make them more participatory and thus more democratic. By widening human cooperation, and thus by widening the potential avenues of collective participation, deliberation, and creative human action, they can also have the effect of widening the circle of human concern, extending it from the local to the regional and ultimately to the planetary. This widened circle of concern can lead to widened demand for cooperation and for democratic participation – including on a planetary scale.

With this widened participation in cooperation, the democratic deficit in international institutions and other international arrangements can be diminished and new forms of planetary cooperation can be established that are participatory and democratic. New and more democratic worldwide institutions and other worldwide arrangements can be established. In addition, and essential, fairer and more effective ways of upholding and enforcing the actions of these more participatory and more democratic constructs of human cooperation can be devised through the establishment of new global rules – including new kinds of global rules – and through the upholding of these new rules as law.<sup>7</sup> The creation of such heightened levels of cooperation and democratic participation can help accomplish all the agreed global goals for sustainable development.

In fashioning these new forms of democratic expression, we can draw for inspiration and, in some important respects, instruction on the ancient experience of the citizens of the Greek city-state of Athens with a different kind of democracy than we largely practice today. Theirs was a direct democracy in which Athenian citizens engaged in genuine self-rule in a regular Assembly in which, together, they had an equal voice and an equal vote in making decisions for their city-state. It was also a democracy in which the execution of those decisions was done directly by the citizens themselves through a process of sortition – of random

selection – in which almost all officeholders were chosen by lot, and therefore all citizens had an equal opportunity to rule and all citizens ruled and were ruled in turn. The shortcomings of the Athenian democracy are striking to the modern eye, not least in the fact that most of the Athenians – women, enslaved people, and immigrants – were excluded from citizenship and thus had no say in how they were ruled. Yet, even so, the structure of that first democracy is one we can and should emulate in many respects today in constructing the structure of a different and much more inclusive kind of democracy than the one we have now.

For its citizens, the Athenian democracy was living proof that, when they are free to do so, people can govern themselves in a living democracy. Despite all its faults, democratic Athens was a showcase for the potential of participatory democratic self-rule. The rise, triumph, and eventual fall of the Athenian form of democracy provided enduring lessons on what to do – and on what not to do – in creating, enhancing, and sustaining such true self-rule. Much in what was considered and in what happened during the antecedents, the creation, and the long experience of the Athenian democracy for the nearly two centuries of its existence, foreshadowed much that would follow in 2,500 years of further evolution of democratic governance. And much of the ancient Athenian experience is still relevant today to the task of shaping new forms of more participatory democratic governance for sustainable ends.

The German international legal scholar and global thinker Ernst Ulrich Petersmann has written that “cosmopolitan thinkers often neglect how their moral cosmopolitan claims can be transformed into positive international law and institutions.”<sup>8</sup> Those who assert these claims are often better at abstractions than at turning abstractions into practical proposals. The claims are real. The structures for satisfying those claims are often missing. This is one reason why there is, as Petersmann has put it, “inadequate ‘institutionalization’ of democratic and cosmopolitan public reason beyond state borders.”<sup>9</sup> The ancient Athenian experience of democracy can help us conceive of what the needed structure of global “institutionalization” should be today and how it should unfold to become democratic global governance.

The late American political theorist James Bohman observed that “the problem that democratic theory needs to solve is ... how to establish

a different *type* of democracy.”<sup>10</sup> The thesis of this book is that we can establish one – if we can summon the public trust, the political will, and the right kind of leadership at every level of governance to do so through cooperation and collective action. The path toward this different type of democracy is a combination of individual and collective wisdom through the right kind of representation and vastly more extensive popular participation. The means of achieving the needed extent of participation is sortition. We must reform and keep many of our current forms of democratic representation. But that will not be enough. Through the addition of random selection, such as that practiced by the ancient Athenians, to our current means of democratic governance, we can reimagine our current forms of cooperation at every level of governance to make them truly democratic. Through modern scientific means of random sampling, we can create a universal participation in which every variation of the voice of humanity can have an equal chance to be heard and every individual person can have an equal opportunity to share in decision-making.

The new structures of democratic governance that are established in this way can be added to existing institutions of governance and made a part of new institutions of governance – from the local up to and including the global. They can supplement and complement what already exists, making it vastly more democratic. Importantly, these new structures of sortition – new randomly selected circles of participation – can be authorized to join in making binding decisions. This new form of democratic expression can transform existing democratic decision-making by adding to it an integral element of direct democracy. With this different kind of democracy, we can institute true self-rule, we can make democratic global governance real, and we can achieve global sustainable development.

What is more, the thesis of this book is that democracy and sustainable development are unavoidably linked. The success of one depends on the success of the other. This is so locally. This is so globally. This is so in every dimension of cooperative human endeavor. It is through the human development that results from sustainable development that we as individuals can become more capable of governing ourselves in a democracy – and thus of making democracy work. And it is through the institution and the practice of democracy that we as humanity can

find the will and the way to pursue and accomplish the societal transformations needed to achieve sustainable development. Free and open democracies in which all citizens have an equal chance to participate equally will support the creativity and innovation that are needed for problem-solving in a world too full of the problems posed by the multiplicity of obstacles to sustainable development. And freedom and openness feed the optimism that is indispensable to summoning the will to solve these problems and overcome these obstacles. Thus, the different kind of democracy proposed in the following pages is not only necessary to true self-rule. It is also essential to the task of attaining global sustainable development.<sup>11</sup>

We begin, in the Overture, with an imagined visit to the birthplace of democracy in ancient Athens in Greece to see how the Athenians practiced democratic participation millennia ago. Then we return to the present, where, in Chapter 1, we recount all that rightly gives us cause for apprehension today and that is inciting a spreading and deepening pessimism; in Chapter 2, we reaffirm our duty of optimism, despite the daunting conflation of ecological and other crises we face, and explain our justifications for being optimistic; and, in Chapter 3, we examine the premises for the kinds of human action that can be taken further to justify this optimism by transforming it into human accomplishment.

In the next two chapters, Chapters 4 and 5, we return to ancient Athens and explore the origin, creation, and development of Athenian democracy. We examine the crucial role that broad citizen participation played in the extent of its long success. In these two chapters, set entirely in the past, we learn what happened in ancient democratic Athens and see how it can provide us with useful insights into shaping what we must do today. Then, informed by the past, we return for the rest of the book to the present and to the different dimensions of participation that should, with an eye to the ancient Athenian experience, inform our uplifting of democracy for a sustainable world.

These aspects of participation include: cooperation, in Chapter 6; naturization, in Chapter 7; liberation through participation, in Chapter 8; and deliberation and sortition, in Chapter 9. Proceeding from these considerations, next come specific proposals for the creation of new forms of democratic participation at every level of governance, from



the local up to the planetary, including institution-building through expanded participation, in Chapters 10 and 11; the use of expertise, interaction, and rulemaking and rule upholding through this broader participation, in Chapter 12; and lastly, the creation and recreation of public trust for the summoning of political will and the finding of the right kind of leadership that can be discovered through broad democratic participation in living democracies, in Chapter 13. Throughout all this, there is a focus on the crucial role of bottom-up sustainable development networks worldwide as catalysts for securing, not only global sustainable development, but also genuine democratic self-rule, from direct engagement in local communities to direct engagement in international institutions and in all the rest of global governance.

As the British political scientist Sir Ernest Barker wrote more than a century ago in his classic work, *The Political Thought of Plato and Aristotle*: “The roots of the present lie deep in the past.”<sup>12</sup> In the myopia of modernity, we have an increasing tendency today to presume that the world began yesterday and that all we confront today is being confronted by humanity for the first time. This is not so. For millennia, we humans have struggled with our ambivalence about nature and our relationship to it. For millennia, too, we have struggled over how best to live together and govern our striving species so that we might survive and thrive. In these struggles, we have often faced similar questions; and, to these struggles, we have brought the same frail and fallible – but sometimes admirable – human nature. Thus, in answering many of the questions we must answer now, it behooves us to begin in the past by looking back to the roots of the present. From what we learn there, perhaps we can, more creatively and more successfully, start to forge a sustainable future through the right kinds of human action.

This is most certainly true of democracy. The late German classicist Bruno Snell observed: “All the questions that were asked by the Greeks have remained our own questions too.”<sup>13</sup> This includes our questions about democracy. What is recognizable to us as democracy began in antiquity in Athens, in 508 BC, with the demands of common Athenian citizens and with the concomitant governmental innovations that were crafted by a visionary Athenian aristocrat named Cleisthenes that, with the support of those common citizens, were put into practice

on a hillside not far from the Athenian Acropolis called the Pnyx.<sup>14</sup> To shape the right future, to uplift democracy for a sustainable world, we must recall that distant past, find anew the path first marked then by the ancient Athenians, return to it, and follow it from here to the fullest extent of democracy's implications and to the highest measure of our ambitions, for self-governance, self-fulfillment, and sustainable human achievement.