Democracy and methodological pluralism

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How can science, and the values incorporated in the tradition of modern science, contribute to strengthen democracy? Answers depend on how democracy and science are understood. I will sketch two conceptions of democracy: *representative democracy* (RDem) and *participatory democracy* (PDem). And, two of scientific research: *decontextualizing research* (DR) (Lacey, 2016) that incorporates "basic scientific" and technoscientific research, including *commercialized science* (CS); and *multi-strategic research* (MS-R), research that allows a pluralism of methodological approaches – or strategies (Lacey, 2016) – so that objects of all kinds can be investigated. It is said that DR contributes to strengthen RDem: that it engenders technoscientific innovations, highly valued in such areas as communications, medicine, agriculture, energy and transport – which enhance the quality of our lives, widen the horizon of our aspirations and open new possibilities for progressively reorganizing societies – and simultaneously strengthens interests that embody values of capital and the market. However, DR *by itself* cannot generate the type of knowledge needed to inform the practices of those, holding values cultivated in PDem, who advocate for widespread popular participation (including of the historically marginalized) in decision-making pertaining to areas (where popular participation rarely is welcomed in RDems), such as the production and distribution of goods and services, the objectives and processes of the workplace, and the types of social arrangements that can exist and flourish. Their practices need to be informed by knowledge obtained under the plurality of strategies permitted in MS-R, not only strategies of DR. Instead of making a general argument for this last claim, I will illustrate its implications for research in agriculture. I will show that DR serves interests that embody values of capital and the market – by means of introducing technologies of, e.g., GMOs and uses of agrotoxics – and (as deployed in CS), since they threaten the viability of the social and ecological conditions required for engaging in agroecology, it does so at the expense of the values embodied in the practices of agroecology. These values (embodied in PDem) include those connected with social justice, strengthening the agency of the marginalized, food sovereignty and environmental sustainability (Lacey, 2015). Proponents of agroecology, on the one hand, challenge the type of production and distribution of agricultural goods that is shaped by agribusiness (with strong support from many RDem governments), the objectives of agricultural production (emphasizing production for export) and the public policies that encourage them, and the creation of conditions in rural areas that undermine those needed for their desired modes of social organization. On the other hand, they are engaged in active, organized struggle to implement agroecology now as widely and rapidly as possible. The practices of

agroecology, and those of their struggle, need the input of knowledge obtained under strategies that are part of MS-R and that not reducible to those of DR. To be able to contribute to strengthening PDem, science needs to be interpreted in terms of MS-R.