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PART II

INTERNAL POLICIES IN THE FACE OF THE
EUROPEAN GREEN DEAL

CHAPTER 6

The European Green Deal and Agri-Food Policies: Revisiting Technical/ Scientific Narratives Through a Relational Approach

BY PIERRE WALCKIERS



PIERRE WALCKIERS

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1. INTRODUCTION

Scientific progress and technological innovation have played an essential role in the evolution of agricultural practices, particularly through the ‘Green Revolution’ and the ‘Biotechnology Revolution’, and now with the advent of artificial intelligence, precision farming, farmers data, and genetic sequence data, the ‘Fourth Agricultural Revolution’ is upon us.¹ These revolutions have introduced intensive, high-yield agriculture, mobilising a variety of technologies and practices such as monocultures, increased irrigation, agricultural mechanisation, and the use of pesticides and fertilisers.² For example, technological advancements are present in many seed management practices and processes such as genetic engineering and seed selection and standardisation (producing plant varieties that are uniform and have high yields). Another example is the digitalisation of plant genetic resources.³ However, the technology packages and agricultural practices of these revolutions have also had significant negative impacts, such as biodiversity loss and water, soil and air pollution. Some scholars critique the multifaceted crises affecting agriculture at environmental, economic and social levels.⁴ Within the European Union (EU), the agricultural sector requires revision, with one of the objectives of the European Green Deal (EGD) being to minimise the environmental impact of agriculture.⁵

The EGD aims to transform the EU into a sustainable economy and achieve climate neutrality by 2050 through a multisectoral approach covering areas such as energy, transport, agriculture and industry.⁶ Specific strategies include the Farm to Fork⁷ and

¹ Michael Halewood *et al.*, ‘Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture: Opportunities and Challenges Emerging from the Science and Information Technology Revolution’ (2018) 217(4) *New Phytologist* 1407; H el ene Tordjman, *La croissance verte contre la nature: Critique de l’ ecologie marchande* (La D ecouverte 2021).

² Olivier De Schutter, ‘The Specter of Productivism and Food Democracy’ (2014) 2 *Wisconsin Law Review* 199, 201; Christine Frison, *Redesigning the Global Seed Commons* (Routledge 2018) 29.

³ See, for example, the European Commission’s initiatives addressing the digitalisation and sharing of farmers’ data during the 2024 Agrifood Days; European Commission, *EU Agri-digital Conference*, 10–12 December 2024, Brussels <https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/eu-agri-food-days_en> accessed 28 February 2025; Halewood *et al.* (n 1) 1407.

⁴ Michael Carolan, *The Sociology of Food and Agriculture* (Routledge 2021); Olivier De Schutter, ‘Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, Olivier De Schutter: Final report: The Transformative Potential of the Right to Food’ (2014) A/HRC/25/57 24 January 2014 4–5 <<https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/766914>> accessed 28 February 2025.

⁵ European Commission, ‘Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. The European Green Deal’ (2019) 11.12.2019 COM(2019) 640 final 13 <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:b828d165-1c22-11ea-8c1f-01aa75cd71a1.0002.02/DOC_1&format=PDF> accessed 27 October 2025.

⁶ *ibid* 2.

⁷ European Commission, ‘Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. A Farm to Fork Strategy for a fair, healthy and environmentally-friendly food system’ (2020) 20.05.2020 COM(2020) 381 final <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:ea0f9f73-9ab2-11ea-9d2d-01aa75cd71a1.0001.02/DOC_1&format=PDF> accessed 27.10.2025.

Biodiversity strategies,⁸ which set ambitious goals for agriculture. These include reducing pesticide and nutrient use by 50%, reducing fertiliser use by 20%, reducing antimicrobial use by 50%, increasing organic farming by 25%, and dedicating 10% of agricultural land to biodiversity conservation.⁹ These initiatives are implemented through a series of existing legislation, such as the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), the Water Framework Directive, the Nitrate Directive, and the Habitat and Bird Directives. They are also implemented through new legislative proposals, such as the Sustainable Food Systems Framework Initiative, the Sustainable Pesticide Regulation and the Nature Restoration Law.¹⁰

This chapter is set in the context of technological and scientific advancements that are set to transform food systems and the necessary transition towards a more sustainable model, a transformation that is also supported by environmental and climate sciences.¹¹ Based on a political analysis of narratives, the chapter argues that the ‘technicisation’ of agricultural practices also extends to the ‘technicisation’ of narratives and justifications for policies and legislation. This limits the space for political discourse and value judgments in the Commission’s justifications.¹²

Through this lens, this chapter first re-examines the political justifications of the EGD, the Farm to Fork Strategy and the Biodiversity Strategy, based on a ‘technical/scientific narrative’. Indeed, by mobilising technical and scientific narratives, these instruments justify ‘new technologies’ and their promises as ‘critical to achieve the objectives of the [EGD], particularly with regard to ensuring the sustainable use of food systems and addressing climate change challenges.¹³ These technical narratives present new agricultural

⁸ European Commission, ‘Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030: Bringing nature back into our lives’ (2020) COM(2020) 380 final 20.05.2020 <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellara:3c806a6-9ab3-11ea-9d2d-01aa75ed71a1.0001.02/DOC_1&format=PDF> accessed 27 October 2025.

⁹ Krzysztof Piotr Pawłowski and Gabriela Sołtysiak, ‘The Potential Impact of the European Green Deal on Farm Production in Poland’ (2024) 16(24) Sustainability 11080; European Commission, ‘Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. A Farm to Fork Strategy for a fair, healthy and environmentally-friendly food system’ (n 7) 5; European Commission, ‘Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030: Bringing nature back into our lives’ (n 8) 7.

¹⁰ European Commission, ‘Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. A Farm to Fork Strategy for a fair, healthy and environmentally-friendly food system’ (n 7) 4.

¹¹ Ashlee-Ann E. Pigford, Gordon M. Hickey and Laurens Klerkx, ‘Beyond Agricultural Innovation Systems? Exploring an Agricultural Innovation Ecosystems Approach for Niche Design and Development in Sustainability Transitions’ (2018) 164 Agricultural Systems 116, 116; Colette S. Vogeler *et al.*, ‘Agri-Food Technology Politics: Exploring Policy Narratives in the European Parliament’ (2021) 7(2) European Policy Analysis 324, 326.

¹² Colette S. Vogeler *et al.*, ‘Agri-Food Technology Politics: Exploring Policy Narratives in the European Parliament’ (n 11) 324.

¹³ European Commission, ‘Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. The European Green Deal’ (n 5) 9, 18.

practices and technologies as the only rational solutions, guided by 'scientific' and 'objective' consideration and following a universal path to progress.¹⁴ This chapter provides a critical analysis of the Commission's justifications for the EGD, the Farm to Fork Strategy and the Biodiversity Strategy. Using examples of EU seed management, it explains how these instruments rely on scientific and technical narratives to gain legitimacy, and discusses the depoliticisation processes associated with this type of justification.

However, the legal and political analysis of these instruments is also expanded upon through broader philosophical reflections on the role of science, expertise and technology in political domains. Indeed, it extends to metaphysical notions of truth in democracy.¹⁵ Among the various conceptual tools used to analyse political narratives and the relationships between science and politics, EU interdisciplinary literature employs concepts such as 'epistocracy' and 'democracy without politics' to critique the justification of policies as 'objective' and derived from neutral expertise, asserted as being external to any political interests.¹⁶ Following Latour's theoretical framework, this depoliticisation through technical and scientific narratives aligns with what he described as the 'great divide' or 'dualism' between science and politics, nature and culture, and facts and values. In this framework, objective science is positioned outside the subjective political sphere.¹⁷

Contrary to the hypostatised objectivity and science-based approach to the agri-food system, this chapter argues that these narratives rationalise a Western approach to the world, to agriculture and science. Regardless of the exactitude of their technical or scientific justification, these measures are rooted in a Western (and naturalistic) worldview, in which nature and genetic resources are divorced from their socio-political and cultural contexts and treated as functional objects to be valued.¹⁸ However, these Western ontologies are not shared by other actors, such as those from the (so-called) Global South or

¹⁴ Danièle Magda, Isabelle Doussan and Sarah Vanuxem, 'La transition agroécologique permet-elle de renouer le lien aux non-humains? Regards croisés d'écologie et de juriste' (2020) 20(1) *Vertigo* – La revue électronique en sciences de l'environnement 3 <<https://journals.openedition.org/vertigo/28077>> accessed 15 January 2023; Sally Brooks, 'Biotechnology and the Politics of Truth: From the Green Revolution to an Evergreen Revolution' (2005) 45(4) *Sociologia Ruralis* 360, 366; Jeff Corntassel, Richard C. Witmer II and Lindsay G. Robertson, *Forced Federalism: Contemporary Challenges to Indigenous Nationhood* (University of Oklahoma Press 2011) 61.

¹⁵ For example, questions raised transversally can also be approached through pragmatic notions of truth in politics, which fall outside the scope of the philosophical inquiry of this chapter; John Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems* (Swallow Press 1954); Claudine Tiercelin, *La Post-vérité ou le dégoût du vrai* (Intervalles 2023).

¹⁶ Hélène Landemore, *Democratic Reason: Politics, Collective Intelligence, and the Rule of the Many* (Princeton University Press 2013) 50; Alvaro Oleart, *Democracy Without Politics in EU Citizen Participation* (McMillan, Palgrave Macmillan 2023) 82; Johan Christensen, Cathrine Holst and Anders Molander, *Expertise, Policy-Making and Democracy* (Routledge 2022).

¹⁷ Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (Catherine Porter tr, Harvard University Press 1993) 13; Bruno Latour, *Politics of Nature: How to Bring the Sciences into Democracy* (Catherine Porter tr, Harvard University Press 2004).

¹⁸ Philippe Descola and Marshall Sahlins, *Beyond Nature and Culture* (Janet Lloyd tr, University of Chicago Press 2014); Danièle Magda, Isabelle Doussan and Sarah Vanuxem, 'La transition agroécologique permet-elle de renouer le lien aux non-humains? Regards croisés d'écologie et de juriste' (n 14) 2.

within some European movements, who defend their knowledge systems and continuums of relations between the living world, humans and non-humans.¹⁹ Consequently, various scientific, civic and decolonial movements have challenged the technical and dualist dominance of agricultural approaches.²⁰

This chapter aims to integrate these critical elements by going beyond the technical and scientific narrative in EU policymaking to propose a relational approach to the definition of 'the political' that is both post-dualist and post-epistocratic. The relational approach is proposed to re-politicise essential domains that have been relegated to the scientific or technical realm and forms part of a broader research project investigating the potential for (re)integrating holistic and relational elements into epistemic, legal, and political frameworks, seeking to overcome their dualistic legacy.²¹ The relational approach to policymaking draws on a cross-reading of political philosophy concerning science, expertise and technique, as set out by Castoriadis and Latour, with indirect insights from Stengers and Mouffe. Their approaches in political philosophy can indeed offer conceptual keys for rethinking a post-dualistic definition of politics.

This chapter adopts an interdisciplinary theoretical and methodological framework, incorporating EU interdisciplinary studies, Science and Technology Studies (STS), political philosophy and the Narrative Policy Framework (NPF) as an analytical tool.²² This research chapter also positions itself within the continuity of post-human and decolonial perspectives,²³ and 'radical' political philosophy.²⁴ The analysed material includes public discourse from the Commission, as well as debates in the European Parliament. We also conducted a series of interviews with Commission representatives regarding the use of scientific and technical narratives in policymaking.

¹⁹ Iain J. Davidson-Hunt *et al.*, 'Iskatewizaagegan (Shoal Lake) Plant Knowledge: An Anishinaabe (Ojibway) Ethnobotany of Northwestern Ontario' (2005) 25(2) *Journal of Ethnobiology* 189, 217 <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.2993/0278-0771.2005.25.189_islpka.2.0.co.2> accessed 10 July 2024; Adriana Moreno Cely *et al.*, 'Breaking Monologues in Collaborative Research: Bridging Knowledge Systems through a Listening-Based Dialogue of Wisdom Approach' (2021) 16 *Sustainability Science* 919; Danièle Magda, Isabelle Doussan and Sarah Vanuxem, 'La transition agroécologique permet-elle de renouer le lien aux non-humains? Regards croisés d'écologie et de juriste' (n 14) 3.

²⁰ Vandana Shiva, *Who Really Feeds the World?: The Failures of Agribusiness and the Promise of Agroecology* (North Atlantic Books 2016).

²¹ See Section 3.1 below.

²² The NPF methodically examines narratives employed by political actors to promote their policies as different constructions of reality; Elizabeth A. Shanahan, Michael D. Jones and Mark K. McBeth, 'How to Conduct a Narrative Policy Framework Study' (2018) 55(3) *The Social Science Journal* 332; Sheila Jasanoff, 'The Floating Ampersand: STS Past and STS to Come' (2016) 2 *Engaging Science, Technology, and Society* 227; David Estlund, *The Oxford Handbook of Political Philosophy* (1st edn, Oxford University Press 2012).

²³ Matilda Arvidsson and Emily Jones, *International Law and Posthuman Theory* (Routledge 2024); Arturo Escobar, *Pluriversal Politics: The Real and the Possible* (Duke University Press 2020).

²⁴ Chantal Mouffe, *The Return of the Political (Phronesis)* (Verso 1993); Cornelius Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution of Society* (Kathleen Blamey tr, The MIT Press 1987).

In summary, this chapter addresses two main research objectives. The first concerns the form of the technical and scientific narratives used in EU agricultural and environmental policies, and how these narratives contribute to the epistocratic and dualistic depoliticisation of policies (Section 1). Secondly, in response to this question, the chapter explores the possibility of a relational approach to policymaking and argues for a holistic definition of the political, one that does not rely on the science/politics dualism and its consequent depoliticisation. This relational approach draws inspiration from the political philosophy of Latour, Stengers, Mouffe and Castoriadis (Section 2).

2. THEORISING THE DEPOLITICISATION OF EU AGRI-FOOD POLICIES THROUGH NARRATIVES

This section sets out some of the theoretical and contextual factors that help us to understand the *depoliticisation* of agricultural policies in the EU. While agricultural policies have traditionally been analysed through the lens of exceptionalist and post-exceptionalist justifications (2.1.), the first section transversally identifies a more general reliance on technical/scientific narratives as markers of depoliticising legitimacy (2.2.).

2.1. Situating the narrative analysis within the (post-)exceptionalist framework

The analysis of the technical/political narratives used to justify EU agrifood policies can be considered in the context of existing literature that suggests exceptionalism and post-exceptionalism as frameworks for justification and legitimacy. Indeed, much of the political science literature on EU agricultural policies operates within these conceptual frameworks.²⁵

According to Daugbjerg and Feind, 'Exceptionalism is a political belief system that assigns special status to a group, a sector or a country, often on the basis of a historical narrative, to justify special treatment, to claim the validity of special rules or to mobilize group pride or particular efforts for a group's alleged mission'.²⁶ Under this approach, EU agricultural policies have emerged in an 'exceptional' and compartmentalised context,

²⁵ Carsten Daugbjerg and Peter H. Feindt, 'Post-Exceptionalism in Public Policy: Transforming Food and Agricultural Policy' (2017) 24(11) *Journal of European Public Policy* 1; Pieter Zwaan, Gerry Alons and Stijn van Voorst, 'Monitoring and Evaluating the CAP: A (Post-) Exceptionalist Policy Arrangement?' (2023) 30(12) *Journal of European Public Policy* 2715; Carsten Daugbjerg and Peter H. Feindt (eds), *Transforming Food and Agricultural Policy: Post-Exceptionalism in Public Policy* (Routledge 2019).

²⁶ Carsten Daugbjerg and Peter H. Feindt, 'Post-Exceptionalism in Public Policy: Transforming Food and Agricultural Policy' in id. (eds), *Transforming Food and Agricultural Policy: Post-Exceptionalism in Public Policy* (n 25) 3; Seymour Martin Lipset, *American Exceptionalism: A Double-Edged Sword* (W. W. Norton & Company 1997).

following the idea that agriculture is a unique sector that should be treated differently to other economic sectors.²⁷

There are four dimensions of exceptionalism: *ideas, institutions, interest, and policy*.²⁸ Exceptionalism is therefore founded on ideas that shape and justify compartmental institutions, establishing dedicated political spaces in which political community or interest group can adopt policies that serve their interests and align with their ideas.²⁹ The agricultural sector is an extreme example of exceptionalist policymaking, characterised by its unique ideas, institutions, interest groups and policies.³⁰

First, typical exceptionalist *ideas* include the following: i) that agriculture is produced for the public good and that the agricultural sector makes an indispensable contribution to the national interest (food security); ii) that economic support for agriculture and farmers is deemed necessary due to chronically low farm incomes despite rising consumer incomes. Intervention is justified by the idea that the sector ultimately benefits the entire population; iii) that the government ensures benefits for farmers who are obligated to produce, especially in contexts where they face unforeseen difficulties, such as climate change, unstable weather or plant or animal disease.³¹ Additionally, agriculture can be associated with a range of (possibly divergent) ideas and values. For instance, rural farming communities may be presented as models of local democracy or as embodying national values.³²

Secondly, there are institutions dedicated to this sector, such as the Ministry *for* agriculture, civil servants and farmers' organisation, which meet the needs of the agricultural sector.³³ This aligns with the idea that agriculture is a unique sector, requiring public institutions dedicated to addressing its specific needs.

²⁷ Carsten Daugbjerg and Peter H. Feindt, 'Post-Exceptionalism in Public Policy: Transforming Food and Agricultural Policy' (n 25) 12.

²⁸ *ibid* 1; Pieter Zwaan, Gerry Alons and Stijn van Voorst, 'Monitoring and Evaluating the CAP: A (Post-) Exceptionalist Policy Arrangement?' (n 25) 2718.

²⁹ Carsten Daugbjerg and Peter H. Feindt, 'Post-Exceptionalism in Public Policy: Transforming Food and Agricultural Policy' (n 25) 3.

³⁰ *ibid* 2; Grace Skogstad, 'Ideas, Paradigms and Institutions: Agricultural Exceptionalism in the European Union and the United States' (1998) 11(4) *Governance* 463, 468.

³¹ Grace Skogstad, 'Ideas, Paradigms and Institutions: Agricultural Exceptionalism in the European Union and the United States' (n 30) 468; Carsten Daugbjerg and Peter H. Feindt, 'Post-Exceptionalism in Public Policy: Transforming Food and Agricultural Policy' (n 25) 4.

³² Carsten Daugbjerg and Peter H. Feindt, 'Post-Exceptionalism in Public Policy: Transforming Food and Agricultural Policy' (n 25) 4; William P. Browne *et al.*, *Sacred Cows and Hot Potatoes: Agrarian Myths and Agricultural Policy* (1st edn, CRC Press 2019); Alfred Whitney Griswold, *Farming and Democracy* (Yale University Press 1952).

³³ Carsten Daugbjerg and Peter H. Feindt, 'Post-Exceptionalism in Public Policy: Transforming Food and Agricultural Policy' (n 25) 5.

Thirdly, agricultural governance is characterised by sectoral arrangements through which governments negotiate policies with sector representatives. This leads to compartmentalised institutions and producer-centred policies.³⁴ Often, exceptionalist policies benefit specific groups while the costs are distributed among broader, less organised groups, such as consumers and taxpayers.³⁵ Thus, it is argued that the exceptionalist framework, which treats the agricultural sector as distinct, justifies significant support and the maintenance of conventional agriculture oriented towards mass production, high-yield farming, pesticide use and monocultures.³⁶ Additionally, this group achieves exceptional and specific policy outcomes through various measures, such as price stabilisation by public agencies, agricultural input subsidies, direct payment support for farmers and customs duties.³⁷ Based on this model, the EU Common Agricultural Policy is analysed as a typical policy outcome of exceptionalist justification: presented as one of the European community's oldest objectives, it justifies heavy state intervention in the market on the grounds of ensuring food security and maintaining affordable prices for European citizens.³⁸

As Alons points out, the exceptionalism paradigm and state-assisted policy became the dominant idea in both the EU and the US agriculture after the Second World War.³⁹ However, this type of sectoral arrangement has been challenged since the 1980s with the rise of neoliberal policies.⁴⁰ This shift is due to a combination of budgetary, environmental and other political factors.⁴¹ In fact, exceptionalist systems were characterised by sectoral governance, whereby governments negotiated with sectoral elites. However, since the 1980s, these types of governance have been challenged by governments seeking greater control over policy outcomes and the effectiveness of public spending.⁴² Consequently, some have speculated that the agricultural sector may no longer be exceptional, suggesting

³⁴ *ibid* 1; EU SCAR AKIS, 'Preparing for Future AKIS in Europe' (European Commission 2019) 179.

³⁵ Carsten Daugbjerg and Peter H. Feindt, 'Post-Exceptionalism in Public Policy: Transforming Food and Agricultural Policy' (n 25) 5.

³⁶ *ibid*

³⁷ *ibid* 6; Alan Greer, *Agricultural Policy in Europe* (Manchester University Press 2005); Carsten Daugbjerg and Alan Swinbank, *Ideas, Institutions, and Trade: The WTO and the Curious Role of EU Farm Policy in Trade Liberalization* (Oxford University Press 2009).

³⁸ Gerry Alons, 'Environmental Policy Integration in the EU's Common Agricultural Policy: Greening or Greenwashing?' (2017) 24(11) *Journal of European Public Policy* 1604, 1605.

³⁹ *ibid* 1608.

⁴⁰ Grace Skogstad, 'Ideas, Paradigms and Institutions: Agricultural Exceptionalism in the European Union and the United States' (n 30).

⁴¹ Carsten Daugbjerg and Peter H. Feindt, 'Post-Exceptionalism in Public Policy: Transforming Food and Agricultural Policy' (n 25) 1; Gerry Alons, 'Environmental Policy Integration in the EU's Common Agricultural Policy: Greening or Greenwashing?' (n 38) 1608.

⁴² Gilberto Capano, Michael Howlett and M Ramesh, 'Bringing Governments Back in: Governance and Governing in Comparative Policy Analysis' (2015) 17(4) *Journal of Comparative Policy Analysis: Research and Practice* 311–321; Carsten Daugbjerg and Peter H. Feindt, 'Post-Exceptionalism in Public Policy: Transforming Food and Agricultural Policy' (n 25) 1; Jeremy Richardson, 'The Changing British Policy Style: From Governance to Government?' (2018) 13 *British Politics* 215.

that EU agrifood policies should be approached from a post-exceptionalist lens. In principle, post-exceptionalist systems offer new narratives that justify new policies and broader, cross-cutting objectives while retaining certain exceptional characteristics. Alternatively, the post-exceptionalist framework represents a partial (or incomplete) transformation, whereby an exceptionalist policy sector has not been fully 'normalised' and old and new ideas, institutions, interests and policy outcomes coexist.⁴³

In the EU, new ideas and narratives are emerging to justify agricultural policy. One such idea is the concept of multifunctional agriculture, which emerged in the mid-1990s.⁴⁴ This concept refers to the environmental, social and cultural services provided by farming, thereby justifying public compensation for farmers beyond neoliberal market mechanisms.⁴⁵ It emphasises services such as the revitalisation of rural areas, the preservation of landscapes, and the provision of ecosystem services through nature conservation, education, and agritourism. This multifunctional approach to agriculture is reflected in the policy outcomes adopted in post-exceptionalist systems. While agricultural policies used to focus solely on the interests of the sector, they now form part of a broader framework that includes trade rules, biosafety, consumer and public health security, and environmental protection.⁴⁶ Indeed, since the 1990s, the CAP has been combined with other objectives, such as rural development, sustainable agriculture, the preservation of cultural heritage and landscapes, and the provision of ecosystem services.⁴⁷ This multifunctional approach has become increasingly prevalent in various CAP reforms (1992, 1999, 2003, 2008, 2013 and 2021), meaning that aid for farmers is increasingly conditioned by post-exceptionalist objectives.⁴⁸

In post-exceptionalist systems, institutions are more open to non-agricultural actors and considerations, such as NGOs, trade representatives, consumer associations, animal welfare

⁴³ Carsten Daugbjerg and Peter H. Feindt, 'Post-Exceptionalism in Public Policy: Transforming Food and Agricultural Policy' (n 25) 3.

⁴⁴ Gerry Alons, 'Environmental Policy Integration in the EU's Common Agricultural Policy: Greening or Greenwashing?' (n 38) 1608.

⁴⁵ *ibid*

⁴⁶ Carsten Daugbjerg and Peter H. Feindt, 'Post-Exceptionalism in Public Policy: Transforming Food and Agricultural Policy' (n 25) 10; Gerry Alons, 'Environmental Policy Integration in the EU's Common Agricultural Policy: Greening or Greenwashing?' (n 38) 1609.

⁴⁷ Carsten Daugbjerg and Peter H. Feindt, 'Post-Exceptionalism in Public Policy: Transforming Food and Agricultural Policy' (n 25) 10; Gerry Alons, 'Environmental Policy Integration in the EU's Common Agricultural Policy: Greening or Greenwashing?' (n 38) 1609; Marko Lovec, Ilona Rac and Emil Erjavec, 'External Shocks, Policy Spillovers, and Veto Players: (Post)Exceptionalist Common Agricultural Policy and the Case of the 2023–2027 Reform' (2024) 46(4) *Journal of European Integration* 433–453, 433.

⁴⁸ Giovanni Anania and Maria Rosaria Pupo D'Andrea, 'The 2013 Reform of the Common Agricultural Policy' in Johan Swinnen (ed), *The Political Economy of the 2014–2020 Common Agricultural Policy: An Imperfect Storm* (Centre for European Policy Studies CEPS 2015) 33; Gerry Alons, 'Environmental Policy Integration in the EU's Common Agricultural Policy: Greening or Greenwashing?' (n 38) 1609.

advocates and environmental activists.⁴⁹ Daugbjerg and Feindt argue that opening agricultural institutions to non-agricultural interests does not necessarily imply complete institutional reorganisation. Instead, the existing institutions remain formally intact but take on new responsibilities, or auxiliary institutions are introduced for coordination and consultation purposes.⁵⁰ This shift away from exceptionalism is evident in the increasing role of the European Parliament since the Lisbon Treaty, as it has transitioned from a consultation procedure to the ordinary legislative procedure, where the Parliament is a co-legislator in agricultural policy. This allows post-exceptionalist proposals to advance more effectively, integrating non-agricultural actors and environmental considerations into policymaking.⁵¹

However, the shift from exceptionalism to post-exceptionalism is described as ‘superficial’, ‘partial’, and even ‘incomplete’.⁵² Indeed, despite the adoption of these broader, cross-cutting objectives, agriculture remains the focus of particular attention and the agricultural sector retains a privileged position, holding exceptional narratives and interests such as food security and the specificity of organic farming.⁵³ Lovec, Rac and Erjavec argue that post-exceptionalist institutional reforms of the CAP have slowed down since the 2010s despite increasing challenges from non-agricultural stakeholders.⁵⁴ Additionally, individual scholars have criticised the CAP reform of 2014–2020 as ‘greenwashing’ or ‘repackaging’ of old policies.⁵⁵ To understand this ‘shallow’ post-exceptionalism, or this return to an old, repackaged, greenwashed exceptionalist policymaking, several scenarios have been envis-

⁴⁹ Carsten Daugbjerg and Peter H. Feindt, ‘Post-Exceptionalism in Public Policy: Transforming Food and Agricultural Policy’ (n 25) 8.

⁵⁰ Within the Commission itself, powers are increasingly shared, with DG AGRI collaborating with ENVI, SANTE, and the Commission Vice-Presidency; *ibid* 3.

⁵¹ However, it is also argued that the European Parliament’s integration of as a co-legislator retains elements of post-exceptionalist regulation. This highlights the fact that agri-food policy is a particularly complex subject, requiring more voting rounds than other policy areas within the European Parliament; *ibid* 12; Colette S. Vogeler *et al.*, ‘Agri-Food Technology Politics: Exploring Policy Narratives in the European Parliament’ (n 11); Marko Lovec, Ilona Rac and Emil Erjavec, ‘External Shocks, Policy Spillovers, and Veto Players: (Post)Exceptionalist Common Agricultural Policy and the Case of the 2023–2027 Reform’ (n 47) 434.

⁵² Gerry Alons, ‘Environmental Policy Integration in the EU’s Common Agricultural Policy: Greening or Greenwashing?’ (n 38) 1618; Marko Lovec, Ilona Rac and Emil Erjavec, ‘External Shocks, Policy Spillovers, and Veto Players: (Post)Exceptionalist Common Agricultural Policy and the Case of the 2023–2027 Reform’ (n 47) 437; Carsten Daugbjerg and Peter H. Feindt, ‘Post-Exceptionalism in Public Policy: Transforming Food and Agricultural Policy’ (n 25) 3; Alan Greer, ‘Post-Exceptional Politics in Agriculture: An Examination of the 2013 CAP Reform’ (2017) 24(11) *Journal of European Public Policy* 1585, 1599.

⁵³ Carsten Daugbjerg and Peter H. Feindt, ‘Post-Exceptionalism in Public Policy: Transforming Food and Agricultural Policy’ (n 25) 10.

⁵⁴ Marko Lovec, Ilona Rac and Emil Erjavec, ‘External Shocks, Policy Spillovers, and Veto Players: (Post)Exceptionalist Common Agricultural Policy and the Case of the 2023–2027 Reform’ (n 47) 433.

⁵⁵ Gerry Alons, ‘Environmental Policy Integration in the EU’s Common Agricultural Policy: Greening or Greenwashing?’ (n 38); Marko Lovec, Ilona Rac and Emil Erjavec, ‘External Shocks, Policy Spillovers, and Veto Players: (Post)Exceptionalist Common Agricultural Policy and the Case of the 2023–2027 Reform’ (n 47) 437; Pieter Zwaan, Gerry Alons and Stijn van Voorst, ‘Monitoring and Evaluating the CAP: A (Post-) Exceptionalist Policy Arrangement?’ (n 25).

aged: attention and monitoring once post-exceptionalist changes have been adopted; the emergence of external shocks or the emergence of new personalities; recent farmer protests being analysed as relapses into exceptionalism.⁵⁶

This first section has presented academic discussions surrounding exceptionalist and post-exceptionalist frameworks. The next section analyses the European Commission's use of technical narratives to justify policies that operate alongside and reinforce both exceptionalist and post-exceptionalist proposals. The subsequent part examines how EU agri-food policies, particularly the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), can be justified through technical and scientific discourse, thereby depoliticising these issues. This depoliticisation is sometimes analysed through metaphors such as 'policy without politics' or 'democracy without public', as it reduces the space for ideological debates and value judgements in favour of technical issues, where reasoning is framed as either correct or incorrect.⁵⁷ In this context, policymakers are expected to inform themselves and apply technical knowledge to adopt 'science-based policies'.

2.2. The technical/scientific narrative as a tool for depoliticisation

Depoliticisation through technical justifications or scientific arguments is particularly evident when viewed through the lens of narratives and justifications. Firstly, narratives are defined and identified as analytical tools within the EU's justification landscape, before their depoliticising effects are discussed and these narrative frameworks are highlighted through examples such as the EGD and its agrifood policies.

2.2.1. Defining the technical/scientific narrative in the EU

Drawing on previous literature from the perspective of narrative analysis in the fields of international relations and EU studies, narratives and justifications are considered discursive elements and formations produced by political actors (e.g. politicians, stakeholders, states, international organisations) to assert or challenge legitimacy.⁵⁸ Legitimacy is a relational attribute of an institution towards its audience, based on the belief of the audience that the institution's authority is justified. An institution can remain legitimate

⁵⁶ Carsten Daugbjerg and Peter H. Feindt, 'Post-Exceptionalism in Public Policy: Transforming Food and Agricultural Policy' (n 25) 16; Eric Patashnik, 'After the Public Interest Prevails: The Political Sustainability of Policy Reform' (2003) 16(2) *Governance* 203, 211.

⁵⁷ Peter J. May, 'Reconsidering Policy Design: Policies and Publics' (1991) 11(2) *Journal of Public Policy* 187, 192; Colette S. Vogeler *et al.*, 'Agri-Food Technology Politics: Exploring Policy Narratives in the European Parliament' (n 11) 328.

⁵⁸ Jonas Tallberg and Michael Zürn, 'The Legitimacy and Legitimation of International Organizations: Introduction and Framework' (2019) 14(4) *The Review of International Organizations* 581; Agnieszka Cianciara, '(De-)Legitimizing Differentiated (Dis)Integration in the European Union: Between Technocratic and Populist Narratives' (2021) 17(2) *Journal of Contemporary European Research* 128, 131.

even if its decisions go against the self-interests of its audience or cost-benefit calculations.⁵⁹ In this context, the narratives employed by political actors may be grounded in various forms of legitimacy. Boltanski and Thévenot have identified six types of legitimacy (or 'worlds'): *Inspired* (idealism, justice, emotion, creativity); *Domestic* (tradition, esteem, authority); *Civic* (democratic participation, collective interest); *Opinion* (renown, charisma); *Market* (economic principles, competition); and *Industrial* (productivity, expertise).⁶⁰

Based on these elements, this chapter proposes the following working definition: the technical/scientific narrative is a mode of justification employed by political actors to shape and legitimize policy decisions. It strategically invokes the notions of neutral expertise and technical facts to promote their policies and enhance their legitimacy. However, this form of technical and scientific narrative is just one rhetorical strategy among others. For example, political actors may base their narratives on other forms of legitimacy.⁶¹ This technical and scientific narrative can be analysed alongside more 'democratic' or 'political' narratives, which can also vary, ranging from political compromise and majority vote to populism, deliberative processes, citizen consultation or citizen panels.⁶²

This technical/scientific narrative can relate to concepts such as 'industrial legitimacy', 'technocracies', 'agencification', or 'epistocracies', which are found in various literatures that emphasise the depoliticising implications of these narratives.⁶³ Asserting a strict separation between science and politics, technical/scientific narratives construct legitimacy based on supposedly neutral and objective elements or external factors, such as the market or food safety, and avoid delving into 'subjective' and axiological political justifications. In other words, this narrative incorporates objective, indisputable elements into political spheres, such as technical facts and biological reality.⁶⁴ As will be detailed later, this results in the depoliticisation of the political sphere.

⁵⁹ Agnieszka Cianciara, '(De-)Legitimizing Differentiated (Dis)Integration in the European Union: Between Technocratic and Populist Narratives' (n 58) 131; Jonas Tallberg and Michael Zürn, 'The Legitimacy and Legitimation of International Organizations: Introduction and Framework' (n 58) 586.

⁶⁰ Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot, 'The Sociology of Critical Capacity' (1999) 2(3) *European Journal of Social Theory* 359, 364.

⁶¹ Pieter de Wilde, 'Peace, Prosperity and Protection: Narratives of Integration and the "Justification Jungle" of Europe's Public Spheres' (2023) 61(5) *JCMS Journal of Common Market Studies* 1194.

⁶² Agnieszka Cianciara, '(De-)Legitimizing Differentiated (Dis)Integration in the European Union: Between Technocratic and Populist Narratives' (n 58) 131; Alvaro Oleart, *Democracy Without Politics in EU Citizen Participation* (n 16) 83.

⁶³ Agnieszka Cianciara, '(De-)Legitimizing Differentiated (Dis)Integration in the European Union: Between Technocratic and Populist Narratives' (n 58) 131; Pamela Fansardi and Pier Domenico Tortola, 'A "More Political" Commission? Reassessing EC Politicization through Language' (2022) 60(4) *JCMS Journal of Common Market Studies* 1047, 1047.

⁶⁴ Bruno Latour, *Politics of Nature: How to Bring the Sciences into Democracy* (n 17) 29.

Existing EU literature has identified several elements that are useful for characterising these technical and scientific narratives. Firstly, policymaking is based on evidence and rationality, and responds to external and technical necessities.⁶⁵ Certain political issues are presented as predominantly/solely technical challenges that can be resolved through expertise and rational decision-making. Even elements that are usually situated within socio-political frameworks are increasingly being objectified and externalised to the extent that responses to these elements must fit within technical solutions.⁶⁶ Therefore, an objective and value-neutral approach is valorised, while social and subjective approaches are disqualified.⁶⁷ According to this narrative, '[g]ood policy results are based on non-prejudiced "expertise and knowledge of the facts" (...) derived from the concept of science as an independent search for knowledge, with no regard for particular interests'.⁶⁸ Policies derived from expertise and knowledge are emphasised, while the political and value-based dimensions of policies are downplayed. This leads to the marginalisation of alternative or dissenting opinions.⁶⁹

Secondly, this narrative promotes governance by independent and competent institutions and experts that are not constrained by short-term political issues.⁷⁰ Here, political legitimacy is transferred to institutions designed to maximise the long-term well-being of the community ('governing for the people'), which some political actors deem to be more efficient than 'governing by the people'.⁷¹ Finally, these policies are evaluated using indicators to promote accountability, with non-technical values being neglected.⁷² The technical/scientific narrative leads policymakers to believe that adopting evidence-based analyses and impact studies on the functioning of their legislation is necessary.⁷³ All of these factors contribute to the depoliticisation of policymaking.

⁶⁵ Jonas Tallberg and Michael Zürn, 'The Legitimacy and Legitimation of International Organizations: Introduction and Framework' (n 58) 247; Agnieszka Cianciara, '(De-)Legitimizing Differentiated (Dis)Integration in the European Union: Between Technocratic and Populist Narratives' (n 58) 133.

⁶⁶ Marko Lovec, Ilona Rac and Emil Erjavec, 'External Shocks, Policy Spillovers, and Veto Players: (Post)Exceptionalist Common Agricultural Policy and the Case of the 2023–2027 Reform' (n 47) 7.

⁶⁷ Pamela Pansardi and Pier Domenico Tortola, 'A "More Political" Commission? Reassessing EC Politicization through Language' (n 63) 1053.

⁶⁸ Michael Zürn, 'From Constitutional Rule to Loosely Coupled Spheres of Liquid Authority: A Reflexive Approach' (2017) 9(2) *International Theory* 261, 247.

⁶⁹ Chantal Mouffe, *L'illusion du consensus* (Albin Michel 2016); Alexandre Viala (ed), *Demain, l'épistocratie?* (Mare Martin 2022) 17.

⁷⁰ Michael Zürn, 'From Constitutional Rule to Loosely Coupled Spheres of Liquid Authority: A Reflexive Approach' (n 68) 247; Agnieszka Cianciara, '(De-)Legitimizing Differentiated (Dis)Integration in the European Union: Between Technocratic and Populist Narratives' (n 58) 133.

⁷¹ Agnieszka Cianciara, '(De-)Legitimizing Differentiated (Dis)Integration in the European Union: Between Technocratic and Populist Narratives' (n 58) 132.

⁷² Michael Zürn, 'From Constitutional Rule to Loosely Coupled Spheres of Liquid Authority: A Reflexive Approach' (n 68) 247.

⁷³ Pieter Zwaan, Gerry Alons and Stijn van Voorst, 'Monitoring and Evaluating the CAP: A (Post-) Exceptionalist Policy Arrangement?' (n 25) 2718.

2.2.2. The depoliticising nature of this technical/scientific narrative in the EU

A central feature of this technical/scientific narrative is its normative and depoliticising nature. This is because arguments based on technical and scientific knowledge are *in fine* normative, providing narrative conviction that blends descriptive and prescriptive statements.⁷⁴ This normative dimension is reflected in the EU narrative context, where policy actors strategically utilise knowledge experts to influence other stakeholders, justify policy choices or challenge proposals.⁷⁵

Aside from this normative effect, the rhetorical use of the term 'science-based policy' has a depoliticising effect, rendering value-laden, situated and political discourses 'neutral' and 'objective'. The result is a constrained political sphere in which, while values and political preferences can be expressed, they must remain within the framework of a science/politics dualism. Consequently, political arguments must be integrated into and aligned with advanced technical solutions or undeniable market realities.⁷⁶

This form of discourse allows the actors to claim that truth and objectivity as external to themselves, while also disqualifying any opposition to their political proposals. Opposition is then perceived as false or irrational, rather than as a credible political alternative.⁷⁷ In other words, technical/scientific narratives depoliticise the decision-making process by framing complex situations, which are the subject of significant societal concern and affect different groups of people in different ways, as purely technical challenges.⁷⁸ Some argue that these technical/scientific narratives lead to a post-political system, where citizens are deprived of the choice of political projects and are forced to approve 'rational' measures taken by experts, moving from 'policies without the public' to the concept of 'democracy without politics'.⁷⁹

⁷⁴ Ekaterina Domorenok and Paolo Graziano, 'Understanding the European Green Deal: A Narrative Policy Framework Approach' (2023) 9(1) *European Policy Analysis* 9, 15; Claudio M. Radaelli, *Technocracy in the European Union* (Routledge 2017) 251.

⁷⁵ Peter H. Feindt, Sandra Schwindenhammer and Jale Tosun, 'Politicization, Depoliticization and Policy Change: A Comparative Theoretical Perspective on Agri-Food Policy' (2020) 23(5–6) *Journal of Comparative Policy Analysis: Research and Practice* 509, 519; Colette S. Vogeler *et al.*, 'Agri-Food Technology Politics: Exploring Policy Narratives in the European Parliament' (n 11).

⁷⁶ Isabelle Stengers, *Sciences et pouvoirs. La démocratie face à la technoscience* (La Découverte 2013) 10.

⁷⁷ Agnieszka Cianciara, '(De-)Legitimizing Differentiated (Dis)Integration in the European Union: Between Technocratic and Populist Narratives' (n 58) 133; Alexandre Viala (ed), *Demain, l'épistocratie?* (n 69) 19; Chantal Mouffe, *L'illusion du consensus* (n 69).

⁷⁸ Isabelle Stengers, *Sciences et pouvoirs. La démocratie face à la technoscience* (n 76) 9.

⁷⁹ Hélène Landemore, *Democratic Reason: Politics, Collective Intelligence, and the Rule of the Many* (n 16); Chantal Mouffe, *L'illusion du consensus* (n 69) 16; Alvaro Oleart, *Democracy Without Politics in EU Citizen Participation* (n 16) 83; Jacques Rancière, *La mésentente* (Galilée 1995) 142.

This technical/scientific narrative can also be analysed through a decolonial lens,⁸⁰ since 'technical solutions' legitimised by scientific authorities may disqualify attempts at solutions or epistemic propositions from local communities or indigenous groups.⁸¹ The knowledge systems of these 'experts' (who often share a Western, narrow, dualist approach to science) are thus exported to the detriment of 'non-expert' and holistic knowledge systems.⁸² Consequently, there is an imperial exportation of the dominant epistemic model: 'recipients are expected to integrate and assimilate Western realities rather than primarily focusing on local and internal needs or preferences'.⁸³

The way the European Commission justifies its policies is a perfect example of a technical/scientific narrative because this narrative is mobilised in several declarations, non-papers, communications, or even legislative proposals.⁸⁴ Indeed, this depoliticising nature of these narratives is sometimes fully embraced by EU actors, who utilise them strategically and rhetorically.⁸⁵ This strategic use of narratives is particularly evident in technical fields. For example, within the committees of the European Parliament and the working groups of the Council, scientific narratives may oppose or contradict each other depending on the divergent interests of the stakeholders or political parties involved.⁸⁶

Finally, technical and scientific narratives and epistocratic arguments have also been analysed from a functional perspective or through global legal approaches. From these perspectives, technical/scientific narratives can serve as strategic tools to circumvent political deadlock regarding the sovereignty of member states and to justify the objectives of certain EU agencies or international organisations under the guise of 'objectivity' or

⁸⁰ Ramón Grosfoguel, 'The Epistemic Decolonial Turn. Beyond the Political-Economy Paradigm' (2007) 21(2–3) *Cultural Studies* 211; Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Sarah Harasym, *The Post-Colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues* (Routledge 1990); Laurelyn Whitt, *Science, Colonialism, and Indigenous Peoples: The Cultural Politics of Law and Knowledge* (Cambridge University Press 2009) 23.

⁸¹ Laurelyn Whitt, *Science, Colonialism, and Indigenous Peoples: The Cultural Politics of Law and Knowledge* (n 80) 23; Arturo Escobar, *Sentir-penser avec la Terre. L'écologie au-delà de l'Occident* (Seuil 2018) 125.

⁸² Diana Vela Almeida *et al.*, 'The "Greening" of Empire: The European Green Deal as the EU First Agenda' (2023) 105 *Political Geography* 102925, 6; Rebecca Lave, 'Neoliberalism and the Production of Environmental Knowledge' (2012) 3(1) *Environment and Society* 19.

⁸³ Olivia U. Rutazibwa, 'The Problematics of the EU's Ethical (Self)Image in Africa: The EU as an "Ethical Intervener" and the 2007 Joint Africa–EU Strategy' (2010) 18(2) *Journal of Contemporary European Studies* 209, 219.

⁸⁴ Jens Henr Haahr, *Governing Europe: Discourse, Governmentality and European Integration* (Routledge Advances in European Politics) (1st edn, Routledge 2005) 84; Luuk Van Middelaar and Philippe Van Parijs, *After the Storm: How to Save Democracy in Europe* (Lannoo 2015) 297.

⁸⁵ Interview with a European Commission Representative DG AGRI (Anonymous), 'The Use of Science by the Commission and NGT regulation' (Brussels, December 2023).

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*; Interview a European Commission Representative DG SANTE (Anonymous), 'The Use of Science by the Commission and NGT regulation' (Brussels, January 2024).

technical harmonisation.⁸⁷ However, some have criticised the Commission's ambiguous and inconsistent use of technical/scientific narratives, which can be seen as a narrative shift or a justification jungle, when it serves its political agenda.⁸⁸ While this chapter does not explore this, the Commission has engaged in ambiguous and strategic shifts in narratives and justifications, sometimes presenting itself as a technical body, while in other instances positioning itself as a political or even geopolitical entity.⁸⁹

2.2.3. The technical/scientific narrative within the EGD

The chapter will now provide empirical examples of how the Commission justifies certain policies through the technical/scientific narratives in relation to the EGD and agricultural policies. It uses the CAP reform (Regulation 2021/2115),⁹⁰ the Farm to Fork strategy,⁹¹ and the proposal on New Genomic Techniques (NGT) as examples.⁹² In this context, as described by Vogeler *et al.*, there is a paradoxical situation in which agricultural policies become politicised in response to food crises such as Salmonella and BSE crises (e.g. mad cow disease), yet these policies do not receive much public attention.⁹³ Indeed, Vogeler *et al.* consider that agrifood policymaking relies more on technical/scientific knowledge and narratives than policies that receive more public attention.⁹⁴ This is particularly evident in regulations deemed more technical, such as those concerning new genomic techniques or seed market regulation.

⁸⁷ Jérôme Favre, 'Épistocratie et droit global' in Alexandre Viala (ed), *Demain, l'épistocratie?* (n 69).

⁸⁸ Agnieszka Cianciara, '(De-)Legitimizing Differentiated (Dis)Integration in the European Union: Between Technocratic and Populist Narratives' (n 58) 140; Pamela Pansardi and Pier Domenico Tortola, 'A "More Political" Commission? Reassessing EC Politicization through Language' (n 63) 1063; Pieter de Wilde, 'Peace, Prosperity and Protection: Narratives of Integration and the "Justification Jungle" of Europe's Public Spheres' (n 61) 13.

⁸⁹ Frédéric Mérand, *Un sociologue à la Commission européenne* (Les Presses de Sciences Po 2021) 7; Alvaro Oleart, *Democracy Without Politics in EU Citizen Participation* (n 16) 6; Alvaro Oleart and Tom Theuns, "Democracy without Politics" in the European Commission's Response to Democratic Backsliding: From Technocratic Legalism to Democratic Pluralism' (2023) 61(4) *JCMS Journal of Common Market Studies* 882 <<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/jcms.13411>> accessed 2 August 2023.

⁹⁰ European Parliament, 'Regulation (EU) 2021/2115 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 2 December 2021 establishing rules on support for strategic plans to be drawn up by Member States under the common agricultural policy (CAP Strategic Plans) and financed by the European Agricultural Guarantee Fund (EAGF) and by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) and repealing Regulations (EU) No 1305/2013 and (EU) No 1307/2013' (2021) PE/64/2021/REV/1 OJ L 435/1 6.12.2021 <<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32021R2115>> accessed 29 October 2025.

⁹¹ European Commission, 'Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. A Farm to Fork Strategy for a fair, healthy and environmentally-friendly food system' (n 7).

⁹² European Commission, 'Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on plants obtained by certain new genomic techniques and their food and feed, and amending Regulation (EU) 2017/625' (2023) COM(2023) 411 final 5.7.2023 <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:c88fe9ac-1c06-11ee-806b-01aa75ed71a1.0001.02/DOC_1&format=PDF> accessed 29 October 2025.

⁹³ Colette S. Vogeler *et al.*, 'Agri-Food Technology Politics: Exploring Policy Narratives in the European Parliament' (n 11) 328.

⁹⁴ *ibid.*; Peter J. May, 'Reconsidering Policy Design: Policies and Publics' (n 57) 192.

In line with the previously presented (post-)exceptionalist framework, some scholars argue that the CAP reform explicitly seeks to keep the discussion ‘without public’, promoting debates and narratives that rely on technical and objective arguments rather than emotional or subjective ones.⁹⁵ Along these lines, the Commission’s proposed solutions are presented and justified through technical and scientific reasoning rather than political argumentation.⁹⁶ Crucially, the CAP Regulation 2021/2115 was presented by the Commission following an impact assessment and a series of workshops, which aimed ‘to gather evidence/knowledge from experts on CAP-related issues’ and ‘to advance in the formulation of the key conclusions.’⁹⁷ These technical/scientific narratives are also reflected in the considerations of the adopted Regulation. As stated in recital 23, ‘A *smarter, modernised and more sustainable CAP needs to embrace research and innovation* in order to serve the multi-functionality of Union agriculture, (...) as well as improving the uptake and effective deployment of technologies, digital technologies in particular, and the access to, and increased sharing of, impartial, sound, relevant and new knowledge.’⁹⁸

The CAP regulation aligns with the EGD framework, alongside which the Farm to Fork and Biodiversity Strategies can also be analysed within this overarching narrative.⁹⁹ The EGD presents scientific conclusions on climate change and proposes technical solutions to address these challenges, which must be inclusive.¹⁰⁰ In these justifications and narratives, the Commission emphasises the importance of technological innovation in

⁹⁵ Peter H. Feindt, Sandra Schwindenhammer and Jale Tosun, ‘Politicization, Depoliticization and Policy Change: A Comparative Theoretical Perspective on Agri-Food Policy’ (n 75); Elisa Bordin, ‘The Role of Ideas and Interest Groups in Shaping the CAP 2023-2027 Reform’ (2023) Working paper presented during the 2023 ECPR Conference in Prague and quoted with the permission of the author; Elisa Bordin, *Ideational Power in the Common Agricultural Policy Reforms: A Discourse Network Analysis of Interest Groups’ Policy Narratives* (Doctoral Thesis, Università degli Studi di Milano 2025) 30 <<https://air.unimi.it/handle/2434/1167356>> accessed 11 December 2025.

⁹⁶ Colette S. Vogeler *et al.*, ‘Agri-Food Technology Politics: Exploring Policy Narratives in the European Parliament’ (n 11) 340.

⁹⁷ European Commission, ‘Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing rules on support for strategic plans to be drawn up by Member States under the Common agricultural policy (CAP Strategic Plans) and financed by the European Agricultural Guarantee Fund (EAGF) and by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) and repealing Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council and Regulation (EU) No 1307/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council’ (2018) COM(2018) 392 final – 2018/0216 (COD) 1.6.2018 5 <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:aa85fa9a-65a0-11e8-ab9c-01aa75cd71a1.0003.02/DOC_1&format=PDF> accessed 29 October 2025.

⁹⁸ European Parliament, ‘Regulation (EU) 2021/2115 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 2 December 2021 establishing rules on support for strategic plans to be drawn up by Member States under the common agricultural policy (CAP Strategic Plans) and financed by the European Agricultural Guarantee Fund (EAGF) and by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) and repealing Regulations (EU) No 1305/2013 and (EU) No 1307/2013’ (n 90).

⁹⁹ *ibid*

¹⁰⁰ European Commission, ‘Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. The European Green Deal’ (n 5) 2.

achieving sustainability objectives, aiming to modernise societies and make them more sustainable, basing its narrative legitimacy on scientific narratives.¹⁰¹

In the Commission's communications and legislative proposals, it is argued that the initiatives are motivated by 'sound science', and this is reflected in the various adopted legislations.¹⁰² For instance, the biodiversity strategy explicitly refers to the work of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES).¹⁰³ The European Climate Law goes even further by establishing an EU science-policy panel with the European Scientific Advisory Board on Climate Change (ESABCC), who 'serve as a point of reference for the Union on scientific knowledge relating to climate change by virtue of its independence and scientific and technical expertise'.¹⁰⁴ Fostering the technical/scientific narrative, the Commission demonstrates a certain scientific credibility by supporting studies from various institutions, including EU institutions and external stakeholders, which analyse the effects and potential successes of the Farm to Fork and Biodiversity strategies on agriculture in the European Union.¹⁰⁵

This techno-scientific approach to policy justification, along with the momentum generated by the EGD, can also be used to legitimise other specific legislative proposals, such as the NGT regulation.¹⁰⁶ Indeed, the Commission is leveraging the momentum of the EGD to link NGTs with innovative and necessary solutions that provide farmers with improved plant varieties to meet climate objectives, as NGTs would require fewer fertilisers and pesticides and are supposedly better adapted to harsher climatic conditions.¹⁰⁷ The Commission also emphasises the technological shift that enables 'more targeted and precise modifications to the genome than conventional breeding' which 'could or could

¹⁰¹ *ibid*; Eva Eckert and Oleksandra Kovalevska, 'Sustainability in the European Union: Analyzing the Discourse of the European Green Deal' (2021) 14(2) *Journal of Risk and Financial Management* 80, 19.

¹⁰² European Commission, 'Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030: Bringing nature back into our lives' (n 8) 18.

¹⁰³ *ibid* 1–3.

¹⁰⁴ European Parliament, 'Regulation (EU) 2021/1119 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 30 June 2021 establishing the framework for achieving climate neutrality and amending Regulations (EC) No 401/2009 and (EU) 2018/1999 ('European Climate Law')' (2021) OJ L 243/1 9.7.2021 5 <<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32021R1119&from=EN>> accessed 29 October 2025; Ekaterina Domorenok and Paolo Graziano, 'Understanding the European Green Deal: A Narrative Policy Framework Approach' (n 74) 20.

¹⁰⁵ European Commission, 'Green Deal Targets for 2030 and Agricultural Production Studies' (2022) <https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/document/download/69adfd09-3836-4a9e-b673-4435a56ec4cd_en> accessed 17 May 2024.

¹⁰⁶ Interview with a European Commission Representative DG AGRI (Anonymous), 'The Use of Science by the Commission and NGT regulation' (Brussels, December 2023).

¹⁰⁷ *ibid*; Interview with a State representative (Anonymous), 'The Use of Science by the Commission and NGT regulation' (Online, September 2024); Interview with Sofia Sanchez Manzanaro (journalist *Euractiv*), 'Interview (5) on Science in EU Commission Work and on NGT Regulation' (November 2024).

not be produced in nature or obtained by conventional breeding techniques'.¹⁰⁸ Adopting a techno-scientific narrative underscores the need to align European market regulations on GMOs with these new, innovative techniques.¹⁰⁹ However, this approach highlights the technical and scientific aspects of NGT while overlooking certain societal concerns, such as seed ownership and contamination risks.¹¹⁰ This trend is reflected in the Commission's relevant statements and justifications.

Firstly, the Commission emphasizes a biological similarity between new genomic editing techniques in order to argue in favour of liberalising NGT. The Commission either states that the existing legislative framework does not correspond to the 'biology of these techniques', or explicitly asserts that these techniques 'allow us to do exactly the same [i.e. conventional breeding], but faster and with more precision'.¹¹¹

Then, the Commission adopts this technical/scientific narrative, emphasising the approval of institutions and scientific authorities in order to justify its position via the EFSA and the Joint Research Centre, as well as through internal studies on the added value of the NGT Proposal: 'The Commission has relied on EU-level scientific advisory bodies. Safety issues have been thoroughly addressed by the European Food Safety Authority';¹¹² 'The 2021 Commission study concluded that the current rules – mainly the existing Genetically Modified Organism (GMO) legislation – lags behind scientific and technological progress'.¹¹³

Finally, the Commission justifies the NGT proposal by emphasising the importance of the EU keeping up with scientific progress in genetic engineering and adapting to the global market, which is already using these techniques, as well as the promise that these techniques and adapted seeds could be more resilient and productive in the context of climate change. This proposal is necessary, considering the 'current challenges in the agri-food system. Climate change and biodiversity loss have put the focus on long-term

¹⁰⁸ European Commission, 'Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on plants obtained by certain new genomic techniques and their food and feed, and amending Regulation (EU) 2017/625' (n 92) 1.

¹⁰⁹ *ibid* 2.

¹¹⁰ Interview with a European Commission Representative DG AGRI (n 107); Interview with a State representative (n 107).

¹¹¹ Green/EFA MEPs Martin Häusling, Sarah Wiener, Thomas Waitz and Benoit Biteau together with No Patents on Seeds, *Recording of Event Patents and New Genomic Techniques: Do Not Risk the Future of Our Seeds!* (hosted by Martin Häusling (MEP), 2023) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X0s1zar9INA>> accessed 25 July 2023; European Commission, 'Frequently Asked Questions: Proposal on New Genomic Techniques' (2023) 5 July <https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/qanda_23_3568> accessed 30 October 2025; European Commission, 'Questions and Answers' (2023) <https://food.ec.europa.eu/plants/genetically-modified-organisms/new-techniques-biotechnology/ec-study-new-genomic-techniques/questions-and-answers_en> accessed 28 July 2023.

¹¹² European Commission, 'Frequently Asked Questions: Proposal on New Genomic Techniques' (n 111).

¹¹³ *ibid*

resilience of the food chain and the need to transition to more sustainable agriculture and food systems;¹¹⁴ 'The European Green Deal's Farm to Fork Strategy specifically identifies new techniques, including biotechnology, that are safe for consumers and the environment and bring benefits to society as a whole, as a possible tool to increase sustainability of agri-food systems and contribute to guaranteeing food security'.¹¹⁵

While this chapter primarily analyses the Commission's narrative, technical and scientific narratives can also be employed by other political actors, lobby groups or activists to bolster their political stance. Several analyses in the field of Science and Technology Studies (STS) have, for example, examined how certain lobby groups have manipulated and instrumentalised scientific narratives to divert public attention from the harmful effects of a polluting product, or to obscure the responsibility of major carbon emitters.¹¹⁶ In the case of the CAP, scientific narratives are essential for NGOs and scientists who are advocating for a more ambitious CAP in terms of climate objectives or for maintaining these objectives in the face of political backlash, such as the farmers' protests in 2024.¹¹⁷ In this context, these groups rely on scientific narratives and arguments, using titles such as 'Science Calls for Ambitious European Pesticide Policies' or 'Scientists Support the EU's Green Deal and Reject the Unjustified Argumentation'.¹¹⁸ Specifically, with regard to the NGT proposal, certain Members of the European Parliament have also adopted this scientific and technical narrative to challenge certain aspects of the proposal. They have drawn on the opinions of public scientific institutions to criticise the proposal's scientific foundations.¹¹⁹

In summary, these examples of scientific/technical narratives demonstrate the risk of depoliticising agricultural issues by limiting political discourse to scientific questions.

¹¹⁴ European Commission, 'Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on plants obtained by certain new genomic techniques and their food and feed, and amending Regulation (EU) 2017/625' (n 92).

¹¹⁵ *ibid*

¹¹⁶ Naomi Oreskes and Erik Conway, *Merchants of Doubt* (Bloomsbury Press 2010); Christophe Bonneuil, Pierre-Louis Choquet and Benjamin Franta, 'Early Warnings and Emerging Accountability: Total's Responses to Global Warming, 1971–2021' (2021) 71 *Global Environmental Change* 102386.

¹¹⁷ It is worth noting that the farmers' protests in the EU in 2024 could have led to a slight shift in the narrative regarding the reliance on scientific/technical narratives. This prompted the Commission to scale back the EGD, the Farm to Fork Strategy, and Biodiversity Strategy projects. However, this shift has yet to be studied.

¹¹⁸ Jeroen Candel, Guy Pe'er and Robert Finger, 'Science Calls for Ambitious European Pesticide Policies' (2023) 4(4) *Nature Food* 272; Guy Pe'er *et al.*, 'Scientists Support the EU's Green Deal and Reject the Unjustified Argumentation against the Sustainable Use Regulation and the Nature Restoration Law' (2023) Zenodo <<https://zenodo.org/record/8128624>> accessed 12 July 2023.

¹¹⁹ Adrian Ely *et al.*, 'The Possible Deregulation of Certain GMOs in the EU: What Would the Implications Be? A Pathways Analysis' (2023) The Greens/EFA group in the European Parliament <<https://extranet.greens-efa-service.eu/public/media/file/1/8442>> accessed 30 October 2025; Christophe Clergeau (MEP), 'Conférence – 26 octobre – Nouveaux OGM – Connaissance Scientifique, Que Sait-On? Réglementation et évaluation des risques, d'où venons-nous?' (2023) <<https://www.clergeau.eu/2023/10/nouveaux-ogm-event/>> accessed 30 October 2025.

In response to the risks of instrumentalisation and depoliticisation of scientific narratives, the next section explores how we can rethink political power in a more relational way. The section integrates broader reflections from political philosophy and proposes a definition that is not constrained *a priori* by these technical and scientific narratives.

3. RELATIONAL THEORIES AS A TOOL FOR REDEFINING THE POLITICAL?

In previous sections, this chapter examined the use of technical/scientific narratives as a way to depoliticise agricultural issues. We hypothesise that these narratives have this effect because they are based on a dualist ontology (separating science and politics) and an epistocratic argument (granting political legitimacy to science). This section then explores how relational theories could mitigate the epistocratic consequences of the technical/scientific narrative, arguing for a relational approach to politics.

3.1. Relational theories: research objectives

Stemming from various movements, relational theories and ontologies delve into alternative paths beyond the nature/culture and science/politics dualisms, reintegrating the relational continuities between the human and the non-human.¹²⁰ These relational propositions indeed reflect a common concern to take decolonial perspectives seriously, rejecting the particularism of the modern 'great divide' that separates nature from culture (environmental law), and science from politics (philosophy of science and political philosophy).¹²¹ Therefore, the relational approach that we propose is intended for application in the fields of law, the philosophy of science and political philosophy. It aims to critique and mitigate positivist dualism and naturalism within legal, scientific and, within the scope of this chapter, political contexts.

This proposal was developed using a relational approach to critique the nature-culture dualism evident in Western legal systems, particularly in regulations that aim to protect nature while excluding the human communities that inhabit it. Additionally, this approach was employed to explore how legal systems could be adapted to protect the relationships

¹²⁰ Arturo Escobar, *Sentir-penser avec la Terre. L'écologie au-delà de l'Occident* (n 81) 122.

¹²¹ Philippe Descola and Marshall Sahlins, *Beyond Nature and Culture* (n 18); Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (n 17) 13.

between humans and non-humans, rather than nature *per se* or humans directly.¹²² In the argumentative model of the rights of nature, we proposed ‘the right of relations’ to protect these virtuous relationships, without wanting to define or confine them within the Western legal’s object/subject dichotomy.¹²³

In contrast to a positivist and dualistic approach to science, relational theories have been used to advocate for epistemic inclusivity, particularly by criticising a narrow approach to Western science and the systemic exclusion of traditional knowledge. Inspired by feminist, decolonial and constructivist philosophies of science (e.g. situated knowledge, perspectivism, pluralism of knowledge systems and the ontological turn), the relational approach to knowledge provides an alternative to discourses of singular Western and modern science – one that claims to be neutral and applicable, but envisages ‘a disenchanted world, both manipulable and commodifiable’.¹²⁴ A relational approach to knowledge is particularly important for decolonising our approach to agrifood systems, where Western scientific methods and technologies, as well as intellectual property rights, have been exported as the primary tool or the only rational solution.¹²⁵ This unilateralism of sciences, and its use in political discourses, has been denounced for its discriminatory implications, including the expulsion of indigenous peoples justified by Western science and the appropriation of traditional knowledge and genetic resources for food and agriculture, such as the overprotection of plant genetic resources through intellectual property rights.¹²⁶

In addition to the decolonial context, it is useful to note that these holistic, relational approaches to agriculture are advocated by EU-based movements and associations. Magda *et al.* give the example of peasant variety seeds and farmers’ seeds, as well as associations like *Kokopelli* and *Réseau Semences Paysanne*, which promote a relational approach between seeds and farmers.¹²⁷ These seed varieties have been carefully selected and adapted by

¹²² Pierre Walckiers, ‘The “Rights of Relations” between Human and Seeds. An Ecological and Ontological Approach of the Legal Property Regime Complex of Seeds’ in Vicent Sagaert *et al.* (eds), *Property Law Reform, Sustainability and the Commons* (Larcier-Intersentia 2024); Pierre Walckiers, ‘Vers un “droit des relations” entre humains et non-humains comme alternative aux droits de la nature’ (2022) 84 *Louvain Law Review* 9.

¹²³ Emily Jones, ‘Posthuman International Law and the Rights of Nature’ (2021) 12 *Journal of Human Rights and the Environment* 76–101.

¹²⁴ Isabelle Stengers, *L’invention des sciences modernes* (Flammarion 2013) 30.

¹²⁵ Moreno Cely *et al.*, ‘Breaking Monologues in Collaborative Research: Bridging Knowledge Systems through a Listening-Based Dialogue of Wisdom Approach’ (n 19) 920; Chidi Oguamanam, *International Law and Indigenous Knowledge: Intellectual Property, Plant Biodiversity, and Traditional Medicine* (University of Toronto Press 2006); Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass* (Milkweed Editions 2015) 163.

¹²⁶ Laurelyn Whitt, *Science, Colonialism, and Indigenous Peoples: The Cultural Politics of Law and Knowledge* (n 80); Vandana Shiva, *Biopiracy: The Plunder of Nature and Knowledge* (North Atlantic Books 2016); Marie Battiste and James (Sa’ke’j) Youngblood Henderson, *Protecting Indigenous Knowledge and Heritage: A Global Challenge* (Purich Publishing Ltd 2000) 177.

¹²⁷ Danièle Magda, Isabelle Doussan and Sarah Vanuxem, ‘La transition agroécologique permet-elle de renouer le lien aux non-humains? Regards croisés d’écologie et de juriste’ (n 14) 9.

farmers over generations to suit local environmental conditions and cultural preferences.¹²⁸ Unlike commercially bred or genetically modified seeds, which often prioritise uniformity and high yields, peasant variety seeds exhibit a diverse range of characteristics and resilience to local pests, diseases and climate fluctuations. This approach fosters a dynamic relationship and ‘dialogues between farmers and seeds’ where the seeds continuously evolve in line with the changing environment and the needs of the farmer. As seeds are no longer treated as mere functional objects to be valorised, these relational approaches offer an alternative to mechanistic and technocratic seed management, which relies solely on high-tech solutions and standardised, intellectual property-protected seeds aimed at maximizing yields, undermining farmers’ autonomy, biodiversity, and long-term sustainability.¹²⁹

Building on this movement, this chapter makes the case for a relational approach to the political. As a working definition, the relational approach to politics seeks to emancipate itself from dualism and epistocracy by: i) recognising a multiplicity of ontologies and links between humans and non-humans (existing, unexplored or potential); ii) valuing the autonomy of the political community viewed holistically; and iii) acknowledging that political questions invoking specific ontologies or links between humans and non-humans cannot be discredited *a priori* by the application of technical or scientific knowledge. This research and political thought must recognise its positionality – being rooted in a Western ontological context – which calls for caution and self-limitation. Rather than seeking to encompass all political systems under the pretence of false universalism, this relational approach aims to address technical and scientific narratives and their depoliticising effects, whilst remaining open to new, holistic and inclusive imaginaries.

Drawing on the work of Latour, Stengers, Mouffe and Castoriadis, the chapter sets out a two-step argument for a relational approach to politics. First, it moves away from a narrow definition of politics (as defined by Latour or Stengers) that confines politics to an epistemic activity.¹³⁰ Second, it redefines new relational pathways to define politics by exploring antagonistic conflicts, cosmopolitics and new imaginaries.¹³¹

¹²⁸ *ibid* 8.

¹²⁹ *ibid*

¹³⁰ Bruno Latour, *Facing Gaia: Eight Lectures on the New Climatic Regime* (Catherine Porter tr, Polity Press 2017); Bruno Latour, *Politics of Nature: How to Bring the Sciences into Democracy* (n 17).

¹³¹ Cornelius Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution of Society* (n 24); Cornelius Castoriadis, *Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy: Essays in Political Philosophy* (Odeon) (David Ames Curtis ed., Oxford University Press 1991).

3.2. Relational theories for a post-dualist politics

A dualistic approach to science in politics has certain flaws, since scientific arguments about objective truth become dominant in public debate. This epistocratic usage renders other arguments, value judgements and worldviews invalid, as they are deemed less accurate than modern science, which is considered the only legitimate truth.¹³²

These issues traverse the epistemic and political philosophy of Latour and Stengers.¹³³ Using the concepts of Realpolitik, bicameralism, or Plato's cave, Latour critiques the 'great divide', which separates human 'subjective' passions from 'objective' sciences.¹³⁴ In this political configuration, 'Nature' is invoked as the ultimate authority, limiting political negotiations to inquiries that lead to endless scientific debates about deciphering what nature tells us.¹³⁵ Latour considers dualistic politics to be unrealistic and inadequate for integrating non-humans, especially in the face of ecological crises or the intrusion of 'hybrid' issues that pierce through positivist frameworks of object/subject.¹³⁶

For Stengers, science is used as a means of establishing authority in contemporary societies, creating boundaries between what *is* and what *ought to be*, and conditioning the political community to listen to experts and accept being realistic about what *is*.¹³⁷ Making links with GMOs, Stengers criticises the way scientists use arguments about scientific factuality or technological innovation to present these GMO commercial products as solutions to world hunger, while excluding from the discussion the doubts of their colleagues who highlight the socio-economic dimensions of famines or social inequalities involved in commercialising these technologies.¹³⁸ In her view, the instrumentalisation of science neutralises any political conflict and has no real opponents: it educates, guides or attempts to convert an ignorant or irrational public.¹³⁹ She denounces a real problem, both epistemic and political, in the way scientific practices assets a certain objectivity

¹³² Serge Gutwirth and Éric Naim-Gesbert, 'Science et droit de l'environnement: réflexions pour le cadre conceptuel du pluralisme de vérités' (1995) 34(1) *Revue interdisciplinaire d'études juridiques* 33, 36; Arturo Escobar, *Sentir-penser avec la Terre. L'écologie au-delà de l'Occident* (n 81) 26.

¹³³ Philippe Pignarre, *Latour-Stengers, un double vol enchevêtré* (La Découverte 2023) 30.

¹³⁴ Bruno Latour, *Politics of Nature: How to Bring the Sciences into Democracy* (n 17) 10; Niels van Dijk, 'Constitutional Ecology of Practices. Bringing Law, Robots and Epigrams into Latourian Cosmopolitanism' (2023) 31(1) *Perspectives on Science* 159, 161.

¹³⁵ Bruno Latour, *Politics of Nature: How to Bring the Sciences into Democracy* (n 17) 14; Niels van Dijk, 'Constitutional Ecology of Practices. Bringing Law, Robots and Epigrams into Latourian Cosmopolitanism' (n 134).

¹³⁶ Bruno Latour, *Politics of Nature: How to Bring the Sciences into Democracy* (n 17) 18; Niels van Dijk, 'Constitutional Ecology of Practices. Bringing Law, Robots and Epigrams into Latourian Cosmopolitanism' (n 134).

¹³⁷ Isabelle Stengers, *Sciences et pouvoirs. La démocratie face à la technoscience* (n 76) 9.

¹³⁸ Isabelle Stengers, *Another Science Is Possible. A Manifesto for Slow Science* (Stephen Muecke tr, Polity 2018) 2–3, 39.

¹³⁹ Bruno Latour, *Facing Gaia: Eight Lectures on the New Climatic Regime* (n 130) 223.

and neutrality, while disregarding the social questions and dimensions of the objects of these studies and providing technical solutions to multidimensional issues.¹⁴⁰

In this vein, the political theories developed by Latour and Stengers offer new political avenues that transcend the inherent authority of nature or modern science. Instead, they propose methods of creating a common world that encompasses humans and non-humans, nature, science, and politics.¹⁴¹ They introduce the concepts of ‘Cosmopolitics’¹⁴² and ‘Parliament of Things’,¹⁴³ exploring this assembly of the world that humans share with other humans and non-humans. They provide the tools to participate in this shared world without resorting to an overarching entity or idea, such as Natural Law, Science or God.

In Latour and Stengers, the figure of Gaia is essential for rethinking the role of political action beyond a totalising conception of Nature. Indeed, Stengers reflects on the intrusion of Gaia: as a transcendence that can no longer serve as an arbiter or guarantor of resources and which scientists must contend with while acknowledging the Earth as a place where humans and non-humans interconnected and entangled.¹⁴⁴ In *Facing Gaia*, Latour presents Gaia as a figure that can be used to repoliticise environmental issues. He argues that the dualistic ontology of an external ‘nature’ is depoliticising and ‘immunizes against the risks of politics.’¹⁴⁵ For Latour, politics should be able to proceed without relying on a nature or science acting as a superior and impartial arbiter.

As Latour states: ‘in the Old Climate Regime every conflict is prejudged by the simple application of the laws of “nature,” while in the New Climate Regime there is no longer a sovereign arbiter; we have to fight point by point to discover – and no longer to apply – the reactions of the agents, one after another. In the first regime, objects are deanimated – only subjects have souls; in the second, we find ourselves truly in a state of war. In the first regime, Peace is given in advance; in the second, it has to be invented, through the establishment of a specific diplomacy.’¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁰ Isabelle Stengers, *Sciences et pouvoirs. La démocratie face à la technoscience* (n 76) 14.

¹⁴¹ Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (n 17) 161; *ibid* 142; Isabelle Stengers, *Cosmopolitiques* (Empêcheurs de penser rond 2022) 10.

¹⁴² Isabelle Stengers, *Cosmopolitiques* (n 141) 20.

¹⁴³ Bruno Latour, *Facing Gaia: Eight Lectures on the New Climatic Regime* (n 130) 255; Gérard de Vries, Bruno Latour. *Une introduction* (Fleur Courtois-L'Heureux tr, La Découverte 2018) 170.

¹⁴⁴ Isabelle Stengers, In *Catastrophic Times: Resisting the Coming Barbarism* (Andrew Goffey tr, Open Humanities Press 2015) 43.

¹⁴⁵ Bruno Latour, *Facing Gaia: Eight Lectures on the New Climatic Regime* (n 130) 225.

¹⁴⁶ *ibid* 238.

In this way, Latour's political approach echoes that of Mouffe, who denounces consensus and rationalism as illusions that block any political project by being overarching and totalising entities.¹⁴⁷ Popular among critical EU scholars,¹⁴⁸ Mouffe considers democratic spaces to be post-political because they defuse conflicts and alternatives, imposing politically rational paths or unassailable status quo. In response, she argues that the antagonistic and confrontational nature of politics must be recognised as essential to democracy.

Both Latour and Mouffe engage with and critique Schmitt's philosophy, which views politics as a space of conflict between enemies.¹⁴⁹ This allows Latour to argue against any scientific/technical narrative that appeals to science and nature as an impartial and disinterested third party because such narratives erase the political and diplomatic sphere.¹⁵⁰ Therefore, Latour's political philosophy breaks with the dualism of an external nature, instead using the figure of Gaia to embody these earthly connections, these elements that vitally matter for the political community, opening up avenues for diplomatic and cosmopolitical transactions.¹⁵¹ Consequently, the metaphor of adversary and war does not correspond to a predefined path, nor does it offer an ideal or desirable solution. Instead, it serves as yet another demonstration of the necessity of a relational approach to the political in order to emancipate itself from the outdated dome of 'Nature' or 'science' frameworks, under which conflicts were organised.¹⁵²

In the face of technical and dualistic arguments and narratives, the propositions of Latour, Stengers and Mouffe offer a way to redefine politics beyond dualistic ontological frameworks. This political philosophy is thus both relational and pluralistic, allowing for the coexistence of various ontologies. Accordingly, the cosmopolitical proposal must accommodate conflict without disqualifying certain perspectives *a priori* through scientific or technical narratives, nor imposing naturalistic authority.¹⁵³ When applied to the technical and scientific narratives that shape the EGD and EU agrifood policies, it becomes clear that there is the risk of depoliticising political debates through false consensus, whereby science is positioned as an independent arbiter. By contrast, an

¹⁴⁷ Chantal Mouffe, *L'illusion du consensus* (n 69).

¹⁴⁸ Mouffe is a reference in critical literature on EU policymaking. She denounces the way in which experts and attempts to build consensus ultimately immunise political practice against conflict, which she considers to be essential for genuine political activity; *ibid* 16; Alvaro Oleart, *Democracy Without Politics in EU Citizen Participation* (n 16) 83.

¹⁴⁹ Bruno Latour, *Facing Gaia: Eight Lectures on the New Climatic Regime* (n 130) 236; Chantal Mouffe, *The Return of the Political* (n 24) 2.

¹⁵⁰ Bruno Latour, *Facing Gaia: Eight Lectures on the New Climatic Regime* (n 130) 237.

¹⁵¹ *ibid* 241.

¹⁵² *ibid* 237.

¹⁵³ *ibid* 245; Gérard de Vries, *Bruno Latour. Une introduction* (n 143) 237.

agonistic political approach, freed from the authority of a positivist conception of science, creates a greater space for political imaginaries and social discourse. The argument for repoliticisation is further advanced by Castoriadis' approach to imaginaries in politics, as explored below.

3.3. From *techné* to *praxis*: An outline of the politics of the imaginaries

This epistemological investigation also echoes questions articulated by Castoriadis in a different way. This section revisits his scholarship and contrasts it with relational approaches. In order to find alternatives to technical/political narratives and the predominant role given to expertise in technical debates, Castoriadis's ideas enable us to reconsider politics as *praxis* rather than *techné* (3.3.1), thus creating space to revalue radical political imaginaries that can be relational (3.3.2).

3.3.1. Defining politics as an autonomous and self-creative praxis

Throughout his writings, Castoriadis sought to reconcile argumentation with the fundamental principle of democratic self-creation: a process that is constantly renewed and renewable and capable of setting its own limits.¹⁵⁴ This democratic self-determination necessarily implies epistemological relativism, whereby all opinions can be expressed and given a fair hearing. This epistemological relativism is not naïve, but rather situated *in* and informed *from* history.¹⁵⁵ However, this epistemological relativism raises questions about its compatibility with argumentative rhetoric. Indeed, argumentation presupposes a 'principle of the best argument', where political decisions are framed by the argument of 'truth' and must conform to what is most rationally acceptable.¹⁵⁶ It is worth questioning whether political debates in this configuration are trapped in an argumentative loop where scientific narratives and epistocracies resume the role of the best argument.

As an alternative, Castoriadis's philosophy offers a different definition of politics, viewing it as '*praxis*' rather than '*techné*'. Unlike *techné*, politics as *praxis* does not rely on theoretical knowledge or mastery of the object being manipulated or transformed.¹⁵⁷ However, it is precisely this feature that enables politics as *praxis* to correspond to the objective of

¹⁵⁴ Cornelius Castoriadis, *Sur 'Le Politique' de Platon* (Seuil 2021); Cornelius Castoriadis, *L'institution imaginaire de la société* (Éditions Du Seuil 1975) 9.

¹⁵⁵ Cornelius Castoriadis, *L'institution imaginaire de la société* (n 154) 46.

¹⁵⁶ Chris Marker, Interview with Cornelius Castoriadis, 'L'invention Grecque de la démocratie directe. L'héritage de La Chouette' (1989) 7 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kNP4SV9p15A&t=18s&ab_channel=AndreaCirila> accessed 30 October 2025.

¹⁵⁷ Cornelius Castoriadis, *L'institution imaginaire de la société* (n 154) 104.

societal self-institution, ensuring the autonomy of all subjects.¹⁵⁸ Incorporating a holistic aim where ends and means are interdependent, politics as *praxis* follows this project of autonomy. It aims to develop autonomy as an end in itself and utilises autonomy as a means to this end.¹⁵⁹ As an illustration, in the term *praxis*, Castoriadis includes psychoanalysis and the education of a child, where the sole aim is the autonomy of the subject and this autonomy is also the primary means employed (where end and means are indisputable).¹⁶⁰ He writes: 'We term praxis that doing in which the other or others are intended as autonomous beings, considered as the essential agents of the development of their own autonomy. True politics, true pedagogy and true medicine, to the extent that they have ever existed, belong to praxis.'¹⁶¹

Unlike *praxis*, *techné* is *zweckrational*, distinguishing between ends and appropriate means to achieve them.¹⁶² Politics as *techné* seeks mastery and expertise over its subject, navigating fantasies of absolute knowledge and purely rational political activity.¹⁶³ According to this conception, politics relies on practically exhaustive knowledge for its domain,¹⁶⁴ establishing conditions for desired results and laying out the means to achieve its ends.¹⁶⁵ In this way, technique is considered an implementation of knowledge, which distinguishes itself from that knowledge and does not take into consideration the ultimate aims of the activity in question. Although several types of activities specific to technique may fall under the concept of 'rational activity', Castoriadis excludes politics as *praxis*, as this cannot be based on exhaustive prior knowledge.¹⁶⁶

This distinction between *techné* and *praxis* has concrete implications for the role of knowledge in politics (see Table 1). Indeed, politics as *praxis* (as well as education, etc.), given its end/means of autonomy, cannot rely on a complete elucidation of its object or mode of operation.¹⁶⁷ The role of knowledge is articulated differently in *praxis* since this knowledge is fragmentary and provisional. Firstly, the knowledge is fragmentary because it is impossible to create an exhaustive theory of history and humanity. Secondly, the

¹⁵⁸ Jean-Louis Prat, *Introduction à Castoriadis* (La Découverte 2007) 81.

¹⁵⁹ Cornelius Castoriadis, *L'institution imaginaire de la société* (n 154) 103; Jean-Louis Prat, *Introduction à Castoriadis* (n 158) 85.

¹⁶⁰ Cornelius Castoriadis, *L'institution imaginaire de la société* (n 154) 112; Jean-Louis Prat, *Introduction à Castoriadis* (n 158) 85; Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Les Aventures de la dialectique* (Folio 2000).

¹⁶¹ Cornelius Castoriadis, *L'institution imaginaire de la société* (n 154) 112; Jean-Louis Prat, *Introduction à Castoriadis* (n 158) 87.

¹⁶² Jean-Louis Prat, *Introduction à Castoriadis* (n 158) 87.

¹⁶³ Cornelius Castoriadis, *L'institution imaginaire de la société* (n 154) 97.

¹⁶⁴ Practically, he refers to the knowledge relevant to the specific domain in question; while also reminding that, even when fragmented to a precise domain, knowledge cannot be entirely exhaustive; *ibid* 99.

¹⁶⁵ Cornelius Castoriadis, *L'institution imaginaire de la société* (n 154) 99.

¹⁶⁶ *ibid* 103.

¹⁶⁷ *ibid* 104.

knowledge is provisional because *praxis* brings forth new knowledges, 'for it makes the world speak a language that is at once singular and universal'.¹⁶⁸ In other words, theory cannot be provided in advance in *praxis* because it emerges from the activity itself (i.e. political action).¹⁶⁹ Political legitimacy cannot be based on the application of technical knowledge alone, but rather on its ability to generate new knowledge while respecting the autonomy of subjects.¹⁷⁰ Therefore, the fragmented and provisional knowledges of *praxis* differ from the knowledges of technique, or any claim to absolute knowledge in politics.¹⁷¹

Table 1: Divergence Between *Techné* and *Praxis* in Castoriadis's Political Theory.

	Political approach		Relation to Knowledge	
<i>Techné</i>	Distinction between aimed goals and appropriate means	Mastery of the object/subject and its mode of operation	Application of a limited know-how to the relevant domain	Expertise may be heard in politics, as advice and within its domain
<i>Praxis</i>	Indissociability between ends and means	Autonomy of subjects (as both means and ends); the ability to weave together	Co-construction of fragmented and provisional knowledge	Bringing forth discussions among autonomous subjects

With regard to the relationship between science, expertise and politics, Castoriadis's distinction between *techné* and *praxis* prompts us to reconsider the role of expertise within an autonomous political group.¹⁷² *Praxis* implies the autonomy of subjects and the emergence of knowledge within and for this political community. By its very nature, however, there is no expertise or political science that can be applied directly to *praxis* and that would be the faculty of certain individuals.¹⁷³ The existence of 'experts' in politics, understood as 'technicians' of political matters, is contrary to the principle of democracy.¹⁷⁴

¹⁶⁸ *ibid* 105.

¹⁶⁹ *ibid*

¹⁷⁰ *ibid*

¹⁷¹ *ibid* 104.

¹⁷² Cornelius Castoriadis, 'La polis grecque et la création de la démocratie' (1986) 38(1) *Le Débat* 126–144 [1–17].

¹⁷³ Sophie Klimis, *L'énigme de l'humain et l'invention de la politique. Les racines grecques de la philosophie moderne et contemporaine* (De Boeck 2014) 299.

¹⁷⁴ Cornelius Castoriadis, 'La polis grecque et la création de la démocratie' (n 172) 8; Sophie Klimis, *L'énigme de l'humain et l'invention de la politique. Les racines grecques de la philosophie moderne et contemporaine* (n 173) 297.

When it comes to public affairs, it is the political community that is concerned and best placed to make decisions.¹⁷⁵ Rather than delegating political decision-making to experts, Castoriadis emphasises the essential role of the political community, referring to the *ecclesia* in ancient Greece. The Athenians may have sought the advice of technicians to construct a building or a ship, but when it came to political affairs, they listened to each member of the political community.¹⁷⁶

However, this conception of democracy does not inherently imply the exclusion of *techné* or any form of relativism. As long as it remains within its proper domain, *techné*, tied to a specific technical activity, is recognised and accepted.¹⁷⁷ According to an aristocratic principle, the 'best' specialised magistrates can be elected to carry out technical tasks such as boat construction or the art of war. However, this aristocratic principle is limited to areas of specific knowledge, not 'general' politics, and this election is accompanied by the right of recall given to members of the political community.¹⁷⁸ Conversely, Castoriadis argues that the privilege whereby experts are evaluated only among peers and according to their own criteria and methods leads to and fosters a form of political irresponsibility inherent in modern hierarchical-bureaucratic systems.¹⁷⁹

Finally, applying Castoriadis's distinction between *techné* and *praxis* to analyse the scientific and technical narratives used in the EU helps to delineate certain limits to the role of expertise in political debates. If expertise is to be consulted within its technical domain, it should remain advisory and serve to inform the political community. This community must remain autonomous in its decision-making process and even develop its own specific political knowledge.¹⁸⁰ In this sense, the political community must be able to engage with agrifood issues autonomously: while scientific knowledge or technical expertise may provide the community with guidance, science alone does not suffice to generate political choices. Indeed, the implementation of these European agrifood policies requires decisions based on values and raises essential concerns among different actors. Therefore, justifying these agricultural policies by referring to external science would exceed the framework

¹⁷⁵ Cornelius Castoriadis, 'La polis grecque et la création de la démocratie' (n 172) 13; Sophie Klimis, *Lénigme de l'humain et l'invention de la politique: Les racines grecques de la philosophie moderne et contemporaine* (n 173) 299.

¹⁷⁶ Cornelius Castoriadis, 'La polis grecque et la création de la démocratie' (n 172) 7; Antoine Bevort, *Pour une démocratie participative* (Presses de Science Po 2002) 41.

¹⁷⁷ Cornelius Castoriadis, 'La polis grecque et la création de la démocratie' (n 172) 133; Chris Marker, Interview with Cornelius Castoriadis, 'L'invention Grecque de la démocratie directe. L'héritage de La Chouette' (n 156) 1.

¹⁷⁸ Chris Marker, Interview with Cornelius Castoriadis, 'L'invention Grecque de la démocratie directe. L'héritage de La Chouette' (n 156) 2; Cornelius Castoriadis, *Les Carrefours du labyrinthe* Vol. 1 (Seuil 1978) 289.

¹⁷⁹ Cornelius Castoriadis, 'La polis grecque et la création de la démocratie' (n 172) 8; Sophie Klimis, *Lénigme de l'humain et l'invention de la politique: Les racines grecques de la philosophie moderne et contemporaine* (n 173) 297.

¹⁸⁰ Sophie Klimis, *Lénigme de l'humain et l'invention de la politique: Les racines grecques de la philosophie moderne et contemporaine* (n 173) 299.

attributed to *techné*, confining the political community to a heteronomous and epistocratic approach to democracy.

3.3.2. The radical political imaginary

As discussed earlier, the distinction between *praxis* and *techné* is useful for reassessing politics and emancipating it from an epistocratic scientific/technical narrative. This chapter's proposed relational approach to politics can draw inspiration from these elements to develop ways of integrating scientific knowledge (understood inclusively) without imposing political choices. Another avenue in Castoriadis's thought is his emphasis on the self-constitutive dimension of society, which creates a rightful space for renewing the political imaginary. Two paths in Castoriadis's work can therefore be explored for our redefinition of the political: politics as a 'weaving together' and politics as an opening of imaginaries.

Castoriadis argues that in democracy, argumentation should involve all citizens, not just the most qualified, and should reject appeals to authority, whether stemming from technical expertise or divine sources.¹⁸¹ When discussing the conflict between Antigone and Creon, Castoriadis values the political wisdom and rationality that involves 'weaving together' (*pareirein*) different viewpoints.¹⁸² Linked with relational principles, this political wisdom entails not clinging stubbornly to one's own reasons without listening to the viewpoints of others. Against any authority granted to expertise and science in politics, and against any madness of 'claiming at all costs to "be wise alone" (*monos phronein*)', Castoriadis urges us to reinvest in this political wisdom of 'weaving together'.¹⁸³

This 'weaving together' would entail listening to the opinions (*doxa*), arguments from all parties, and their value judgments, validly formulated in a democratic society, which constantly needs to be educated to bring forth (*praxis*). As *techné* cannot act as the universal arbiter of what is good in a democracy, this 'weaving together' would thus be relational and involve an inclusive deliberative process, which is essential for a cosmopolitical philosophy.¹⁸⁴ Once again, an alternative to using an external scientific argument to justify EU agrifood policies would be to 'weave together' different political actors, enabling the

¹⁸¹ Chris Marker, Interview with Cornelius Castoriadis, 'L'invention Grecque de la démocratie directe. L'héritage de La Chouette' (n 156) 17; Cornelius Castoriadis, *Ce qui fait la Grèce. 2. La cité et les lois: séminaires 1983-1984. La création humaine III* (Seuil 2008) 75; José Luis Moreno Pestaña, 'Castoriadis, Rancière: quels apports pour une philosophie du tirage au sort en politique?' (Liliane López-Rabatel tr, 2019) Participations Hors Serie 426.

¹⁸² Cornelius Castoriadis, 'La polis grecque et la création de la démocratie' (n 172) 14; Sophie Klimis, *Lénigme de l'humain et l'invention de la politique: Les racines grecques de la philosophie moderne et contemporaine* (n 173) 299.

¹⁸³ Sophie Klimis, *Lénigme de l'humain et l'invention de la politique: Les racines grecques de la philosophie moderne et contemporaine* (n 173) 299; Cornelius Castoriadis, 'La polis grecque et la création de la démocratie' (n 173) 15.

¹⁸⁴ Isabelle Stengers, *Sciences et pouvoirs. La démocratie face à la technoscience* (n 76); Isabelle Stengers, *Cosmopolitiques* (n 141).

exchange of diverse viewpoints and concerns, and fostering deliberation on the choices to be made.

The post-dualist and relational approach to the political can also be built upon the self-instituting force of democratic society, as understood by Castoriadis.¹⁸⁵ Indeed, he recalls that the source of the development of our societies lies neither in historical determinism, hidden rationality, nor mere chance. Instead, he argues that our political institutions arise from the collective imagination of human beings who create them freely and collectively.¹⁸⁶

According to Castoriadis: 'There will always be a distance between society as instituting and what is, at every moment, instituted – and this distance is not something negative or deficient; it is one of the expressions of the creative nature of history, what prevents it from fixing itself once and for all into the "finally found form" of social relations and of human activities, what makes a society always contain more than what it presents'.¹⁸⁷ Moreover: 'Instituted society is not opposed to instituting society as a lifeless product to an activity which brought it into being; it represents the relative and transitory fixity/stability of the instituted forms-figures in and through which the radical imaginary can alone exist and make itself exist as social-historical'.¹⁸⁸

By distinguishing between the instituting and the instituted society, Castoriadis reminds us that the people retain a self-instituting faculty, and are capable of constructing and destroying their own social institutions. Indeed, this is a radical politics of the imagination that can exist and create new and fertile social-historical spaces.¹⁸⁹ Political power thus always stems from this faculty of self-creation rather than from external entities or any principle of heteronormative dualism that merely delegates political power to third-parties: God, the market or scientific rationality, for example.¹⁹⁰ Following this approach, there is a tension and distance between the instituting and the instituted society, opening up the political imagination. This emancipatory space can give rise to other narratives and

¹⁸⁵ Jeff Klooger, *Castoriadis: Psyche, Society, Autonomy* (Brill 2009) 29; Christos Lynteris, *Human Extinction and the Pandemic Imaginary* (Routledge 2020) 140.

¹⁸⁶ Sophie Klimis, *L'énigme de l'humain et l'invention de la politique: Les racines grecques de la philosophie moderne et contemporaine* (n 173) 297.

¹⁸⁷ Cornelius Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution of Society* (n 24) 114.

¹⁸⁸ *ibid* 371–372; Christos Lynteris, *Human Extinction and the Pandemic Imaginary* (n 185) 140.

¹⁸⁹ Cornelius Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution of Society* (n 24) 372.

¹⁹⁰ Cornelius Castoriadis, 'La polis grecque et la création de la démocratie' (n 172) 4; Sophie Klimis, *L'énigme de l'humain et l'invention de la politique: Les racines grecques de la philosophie moderne et contemporaine* (n 173) 295.

political structures that can be holistic and relational.¹⁹¹ As an illustration, Lynteris sought to reinvigorate the political imagination to move away from heteronomous narratives and binary imaginaries reinvested with events such as climate change and the pandemic.¹⁹²

In conclusion, Castoriadis's political philosophy helps to create new narratives and the 'creation of a new type of institution, one that is not predicated on the repudiation and alienation of the source of self-creation'.¹⁹³ Engaging with this space between the instituting society and the instituted society in order to rethink EU agrifood policies involves taking a step back from a certain institutional rigidity that is present in the EU's legal and political landscape. This approach supports the idea that, once a political community has embraced its autonomy, its institutional and legal frameworks can be reimagined to better integrate holistic and relational perspectives. Indeed, the radical imaginaries of politics invite us to consider new possibilities, including relational and cosmopolitical perspectives. In this epistemological and political context, where we must deal with both human and non-human actors, Lynteris states that 'the idea of society as self-creation offers vital tools for conceiving humankind's relation with the world as other than a project for mastery'.¹⁹⁴

4. CONCLUSIONS

In the context of the technological revolution in food systems – with the Green Revolution, the biotechnology revolution, and the Fourth Agricultural Revolution, which encompasses digitalisation and artificial intelligence – science and technology play a pivotal role in agricultural practices and even in their political justification.

This chapter uses an interdisciplinary methodology incorporating STS, political philosophy, and NPF as analytical tools to examine the political justification of the EGD, the Farm to Fork Strategy, the Biodiversity Strategy, and agricultural policies through a scientific/technical narrative. Although agricultural policies have traditionally been analysed through the lens of exceptionalist and post-exceptionalist justifications, this chapter first critically analyses how the European Commission employs a technical/scientific narrative

¹⁹¹ Cornelius Castoriadis, *L'institution imaginaire de la société* (n 154) 156; Jeff Klooger, *Castoriadis: Psyche, Society, Autonomy* (n 185) 30; Christos Lynteris, *Human Extinction and the Pandemic Imaginary* (n 185) 139; Cornelius Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution of Society* (n 24) 114.

¹⁹² Christos Lynteris, *Human Extinction and the Pandemic Imaginary* (n 185) 139–140.

¹⁹³ Jeff Klooger, *Castoriadis: Psyche, Society, Autonomy* (n 185) 32.

¹⁹⁴ Christos Lynteris, *Human Extinction and the Pandemic Imaginary* (n 185) 142.

as a means of gaining legitimacy, and how these narratives contribute to the depoliticisation of EU agri-food policies.

As mentioned previously, this technical/scientific narrative is present in the justifications for the EGD, the Farm to Fork Strategy and the Biodiversity Strategy, as well as in the CAP Regulation and the NGT Regulation. These instruments present new technologies and agricultural practices as part of the solution for the efficient and sustainable use of food systems, particularly in response to the challenges posed by climate change, by justifying legitimacy through science and expertise. This chapter also argued that this technical/scientific narrative is built on a dualistic ontology which separates science from politics, and that it relies on an epistocratic argument which legitimises scientific and technical expertise and institutions in defining political choices. This dualistic, epistocratic approach has a depoliticising effect because it limits political choices to the approval of rational decisions made by experts who rely on external, neutral and objective sciences.

In addition, the use of scientific/technical reasoning to justify political decisions has the effect of rationalising and objectifying the Western worldview, extending it to agricultural practices and science, where nature is detached from humanity and viewed as a functional object to be commodified. However, although decolonial literature recognises the importance of other worldviews, and even within the EU there are (scientific, civic, political) demands for alternative agricultural models that are more respectful of the environment and the relationships between humans and non-humans, it is still the conventional model of agriculture that is justified through references to neutral and objective science. This model is exported as the only valid solution, as if productivist agriculture were the only logical and universal continuation of agricultural practices.

In this context, the chapter re-examined how EU agrifood policies are understood, adopting a relational approach. More broadly, this approach examines the epistemic, legal and political constructs that safeguard our virtuous relations with non-humans without predetermining these connections. The objective of this relational approach to politics is to emancipate itself from arguments rooted in dualism and epistocracy, recognise the diverse ontologies and relationships between humans and non-humans, and to value the autonomy of the political community, without being constrained *a priori* by the application of predefined scientific or technical knowledge. In this vein, the approach supports epistemic openness by encompassing traditional, relational, experimental and citizen knowledge related to agriculture.

The relational approach to revisiting EU agrifood policy draws inspiration from the political philosophy of Latour, Stengers, Mouffe and Castoriadis. Through their various theoretical contributions, these thinkers offer vital tools for moving beyond a dualistic and epistocratic ontology that reduces political activity to a truth revealed by science. In this sense, Latour, Mouffe and Stengers propose a vision of politics as a space of 'conflict' or 'diplomacy', in which the positions of different parties must be taken seriously and cannot be dismissed by appealing to science or nature as the ultimate arbitrator of political conflicts. The chapter also discusses Castoriadis's distinction between *techné* and *praxis*. This approach revisits EU agrifood policies as a *praxis*, valorising the autonomy of subjects, co-constructing fragmented and provisional knowledge, and legitimising value judgments emerging from the political community, all the while promoting a 'weaving together' of diverse perspectives. Rather than succumbing to the temptation of 'being wise alone', a relational reading of politics can be further enriched by Castoriadis's concept of radical political imaginaries. As the political power of a community always exceeds the institutional forms chosen at any given moment, this reinterpretation of agri-food policies creates space for new imaginaries that can be relational, holistic and inclusive of various agricultural practices and knowledge systems.